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# STORY

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Short Story

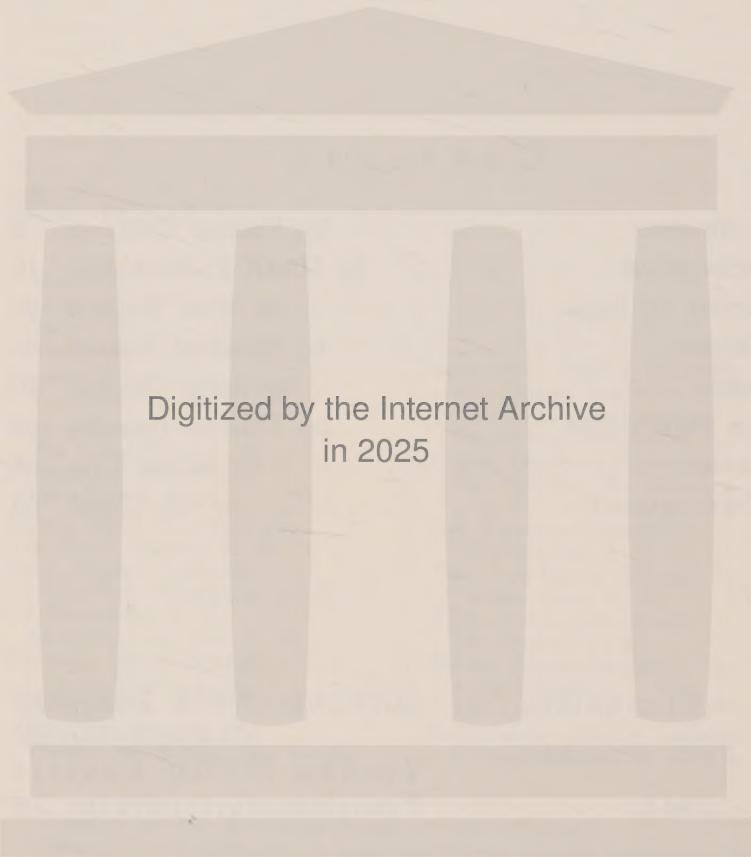
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# INDIAN SUMMER

by

Erskine Caldwell

THE water was up again. It had been raining for almost two whole days, and the creek was full to the banks. Dawn had broken gray that morning, and for the first time that week the sky was blue and warm.

Les pulled off his shirt and unbuckled his pants. Les never had to bother with underwear, because as soon as it was warm enough in the spring to go barefooted he hid his union suit in a closet and left it there until fall. His mother was not alive, and his father never bothered about the underclothes.

"I wish we had a shovel to dig out some of the muck," he said. "Everytime it rains this hole fills up with this stuff. I'd go home and get a shovel, but if they saw me they'd make me stay there and do something."

While Les was hanging his shirt and pants on a bush, I waded out into the yellow water. The muck on the bottom was ankle deep, and there were hundreds of dead limbs stuck in it. I pulled out some of the largest and threw them on the other bank out of the way.

"How's the water, Jack?" Les asked. "How deep is it this time?"

I waded out to the middle of the creek where the current was strongest. The yellow water came almost up to my shoulders.

"Nearly neck deep," I said. "But there's about a million dead limbs stuck in the bottom. Hurry up and help me throw them out."

Les came splashing in. The muddy water gurgled and sucked around his waist.

"I'll bet somebody comes down here every day and pitches

these dead limbs in here," Les said, making a face. "I don't see how else they could get here. Dead tree limbs don't fall into a creek this fast. Somebody is throwing them in, and I'll bet he doesn't live a million miles away, either."

"Maybe Old Howes does it, Les."

"Sure, he does it. He's the one I'm talking about. I'll bet anything he comes down and throws limbs in every day."

Les stepped on a sharp limb. He held his nose and ducked under and pulled it out.

"You know what?" Les said.

"What?"

"Old Howes told Pa we scared his cows last Saturday. He said we made them run so much he couldn't get them to let down their milk Saturday night."

"This creek bottom isn't his. Old Howes doesn't own anything down here except that pasture on the other side of the fence. We haven't even been on the other side of the fence this year, have we?"

"I haven't seen old Howes' cows all summer. If I should see them, I wouldn't run them. He just told Pa that because he doesn't want us to come swimming in the creek."

Pieces of dead bark and curled chips suddenly came floating down the creek. Somewhere up there the trash had broken loose from a limb or something across the water. I held my arms V-shaped and caught the bark and chips and threw them out of the way.

Les said something, diving down to pull up a dead limb. The muck on the bottom of the creek was so deep we could not take a step without first pulling our feet out of the sticky mud; otherwise we would have fallen flat on our faces in the water. The muck had a stink like a pig pen.

Les threw the big limb out of sight.

"It Old Howes ever comes down while we're here and tells us to get out of the creek, let's throw muck at him. Are you game, Jack? Wouldn't you like to do that to him just once?"

"That's what we ought to do to him, but we'd better not, Les. He would go straight and tell my folks, and your Pa."

"I'm not scared of Old Howes," Les said, making a face. "He hasn't got me buffaloed. He wouldn't do anything. He's scared to tell anybody. He knows we'd catch him some time and mud-cake him."

"I don't know," I said. "He told on me that time I caught his drake and put it in that chicken run of his."

"That was a long time —" Les stopped and listened.

Somebody had stepped on a dead limb behind the bushes. The crack of the wood was loud enough to be heard above the splashing and gurgling in the creek.

"What's that?" both of us said.

"Who's that?" Les asked me.

"Listen!" I said. "Duck down and be quiet."

Behind the bushes we could hear someone walking on dead twigs and dry leaves. Both of us squatted down in the water until only our heads were above it.

"Who is it?" Les said to me.

I shook my head, holding my nose under the water.

The yellow water swirled and gurgled through the tree roots beside us. The roots had been washed free of earth by the high waters many years before, and now they were old-looking and covered with bark.

Les squatted lower and lower until only his eyes and the top of his head were showing. He held his nose under the water with both hands. The water was high, and its swiftness and muddy-heaviness made gurgling sounds that echoed up and down the creek.

Suddenly the bushes parted, and Jenny came through. When Les saw her, his eyes popped open and he jerked his head above the water to get his breath. The noise he made when the water bubbled scared all three of us for a moment.

Jenny was Old Howes' daughter. She was about our age, possibly a year or two older.

Les saw her looking at our clothes hanging on the bushes. He nudged me with his elbow.

"What are you doing down here?" Les said gruffly, trying to scare her.

"Can't I come if I want to?"

"You can't come down here when we're in swimming. You're not a boy."

"I can come if I want to," Jenny said. "This creek doesn't belong to you."

"It doesn't belong to you either," Les said, making a face. "What are you going to do about that?"

"All right," Jenny said, "if you want to be so mean about it, Leslie Blake, I'll take your clothes and hide them where you'll never find them again as long as you live. What are you going to do about that?"

Jenny reached for the clothes. She grabbed Les' pants and my shirt and union suit.

Les caught my arm and pulled me towards the bank. We couldn't hurry at first, because we had to jerk our feet out of the muck before we could move at all.

"Let's duck her, Jack," Les whispered. "Let's give her a good ducking. Come on."

We crawled up the bank and caught Jenny just as she was starting to run through the bushes with our clothes. Les locked his arms around her waist and I caught her arms and pulled as hard as I could.

"I'll scream!" Jenny said. "If you don't stop, I'll scream at the top of my lungs. Papa is in the pasture, and he'll come right away. You know what he'll do to both of you, don't you?"

"We're not afraid of anybody," Les said, scowling and trying to scare her.

I put my hand over her mouth and held her with one arm locked around her neck. Together we pulled and dragged her back to the bank beside the creek.

"Don't you want to duck her, Jack?" Les said. "Don't you think we ought to? She's been telling Old Howes tales about us. She's a tattle-tale tit."

"We ought to duck her, all right," I said. "But suppose she goes and tells on us about that?"

"When we get through ducking her, she won't tell any more tales on us. We'll duck her until she promises and crosses her heart never to tell anybody. She's the one who's been throwing dead limbs in the creek every day. I'll bet anything she's the one who's been doing it."

Jenny was helpless while we held her. Les had her around the waist with both arms, and I still had her neck locked in the crook of my left arm. She tried to bite my hand over her mouth, but everytime she tried to hurt me, I squeezed her neck so hard she had to stop.

I was a little afraid to duck Jenny, because once we had ducked a colored boy and it had almost drowned him. We ducked him so many times he couldn't breathe, and he became limp all over. We had to stretch him out on the ground and roll him over and over, and all the time we were doing that, yellow water was running out of his mouth. I was afraid we might drown Jenny. I didn't know what would happen if we did that.

"I know what let's do to her, Les," I said.

"What?"

"Let's mud-cake her."

"What's the matter with ducking her? It will scare her and make her stop throwing dead limbs into the creek. It'll stop her from telling tales about us, too."

"We'd better not duck her, Les," I said. "Remember the colored boy we ducked that time? We nearly drowned him. I don't want anything like that to happen again."

Les thought a while, looking at Jenny's back. She was kicking and scratching all the time, but we had her so she couldn't get loose.

"All right," Les said. "We'll mud-cake her then. That's just as good as ducking, and it'll teach her a lesson. It'll make her stop being a tattle-tale tit."

"She's going to tell on us anyway, so we'd better do a good job of it this time. But it ought to make her stop throwing dead limbs in the swimming hole, anyway."

"She won't tell on us after we get through with her," Les said. "She won't tell anybody. She won't even tell Old Howes. Ducking and mud-caking always stops kids from telling tales. It's the only way to cure it."

"All right," I said. "Let's do it to her. She needs ducking, or mud-caking, or something. Somebody has got to do it to her, and we're the right ones to make a good job of it. I'll bet she won't bother us again after we get through with her."

Les threw Jenny on the ground beside the bank, locking her arms behind her back and holding her face in the earth so she couldn't make any noise. Les had to straddle her neck to keep her still.

"Take off her clothes," Les said. "I've got her. She can't get away as long as I'm holding her."

I reached down to pull off her dress, and she kicked me

full in the stomach with both feet. When I fell backward and tried to sit up, there was no breath left in me. I opened my mouth and tried to yell at Les, but I couldn't even whisper.

"What's the matter, Jack?" Les said, turning his head and looking at me.

I got up on my knees and doubled over, holding my stomach with both arms.

"What's the matter with you, Jack?" he said. "Did she kick you?"

Les' back had been turned and he had not seen what Jenny had done to me.

"Did she kick me!" I said weakly. "It must have been her, but it felt like a mule. She knocked all the wind out of me."

"Sit on her legs then," Les said. "She can't kick you if you do that."

I ran down to the side of the creek and came back with a double handful of yellow muck. When I had dug it out of the creek it had made a sucking sound, and the odor was worse than any that ever came out of a pig pen. The muck in the creek stank worse than anything I had ever smelled. It was nothing but rotten leaves and mud, but it smelled like decayed eggs and a lot of other things.

I got Jenny's dress off and tossed it on the bushes so it would not get covered with muck. Les was able to hold her arms and cover her mouth at the same time by then, because she was not nearly so strong as either of us.

"She's got underwear on, Les," I said.

"Sure she has," Les said. "All girls wear underclothes. That's what makes them so sissy."

"You're not talking about me, are you?" I said, looking at him. "Because if you are —."

"I'm talking about her," Les said. "I know you have to

wear the stuff because your people make you do it. But girls like to have it on. They don't want to go without it. That's why girls are so sissy."

"All right," I said, "but don't try to get nasty with me, because I'll — —"

"You won't do anything, so shut up. Hurry and take her clothes off."

"Are we going to strip her naked?" I said.

"Sure," Les said. "We've got to. We can't mud-cake her if we don't strip her, can we?"

"I know that," I said, "but suppose Old Howes came down and saw us — —"

"Old Howes wouldn't do anything but spit and slip up in it. Who's scared of him, anyway? I'm not."

After we had struggled with Jenny a while longer, and after her underclothes were finally off, Les said he was tired of holding her. He was puffing and blowing as if he had been running five miles without stopping.

I took Jenny's arms and put my hand over her mouth and sat on her neck. Les picked up a big handful of muck and threw it at her. The muck hit her on the stomach, making a sound like slapping water with a plank. He threw another handful. It splattered all over us.

While Les was running to the creek for another load, I turned Jenny over so he could smear some on her back. She did not struggle any more now, but I was afraid to release my grip on her arms or to take my hand off her mouth. When I had turned her over, she lay motionless on the ground, not even kicking her feet any more.

"This'll fix her," Les said, coming back with his hands and arms full of yellow muck. "She's had it coming to her for a long time. Maybe it'll stop her from being a tattle-tale tit."

He dropped the mass on her back and ran for some more "Rub that in while I'm getting another load, Jack," he said. "That's what she needs to make her stop throwing limbs in the creek. She won't tell any more tales about us, either."

I reached over and with one hand smeared the muck up and down Jenny's back, on her legs, and over her arms and shoulders. I tried not to get any of it in her hair, because I knew how hard it was to try to wash it out with yellow creek water.

"Turn her over," Les said, dropping down beside us with a new load of muck. "We're just getting started on her."

I turned Jenny over again, and she did not even try to get loose from me. Les had begun to spread the muck over her, rubbing it into her skin. He took a handful and smeared it over her legs and thighs and stomach. Then he took another handful and rubbed it over her shoulders and breasts. Jenny still did not attempt to move, though she squirmed a little when Les rubbed the mass of rotted leaves and mud over the most tender parts of her body. Most of the time she lay as still as if she had been asleep.

"That's funny," I said.

"What's funny?" Les asked, looking up.

"She's not even trying to get loose now."

"That's because she's foxy," Les said. "She's just waiting for a good chance to break away. Here, let me hold her a while."

Les took my place and I picked up a handful of muck and began spreading it over her. The muck was not sticky any longer, and when I smeared it on her, it felt slick and smooth. When my hands moved over her, I could feel that her body was much softer than mine, and that parts of her were very soft. When I smeared the slick mud over her breasts, it felt

so smooth and soft that I was afraid to touch her there again. I glanced at her face, and I saw her looking down at me. From the way she looked at me, I could not help thinking that she was not angry with us for treating her like that. I even thought that perhaps if Les had not been there she would have let me mud-cake her as long as I wanted to. Unknowingly my hands had reached for her breasts again, and suddenly I knew that we were doing a mean thing to her.

"What are you doing, Jack?" Les said. "That's a funny way to spread muck on her."

"We've got enough on her, Les. Let's let her go home now. She's had enough."

"What's the matter with you?" Les said, scowling. "We're not half finished with her yet. We've got to put another coat of muck on her."

Jenny looked up when Les said that, and her eyes opened wider. She did not have to speak to tell me what she wanted to say.

"That's enough, Les," I said. "She's a girl. That's enough for a girl."

I don't know, but somehow I believed that Les felt the same way I did, only he did not want to admit it. Now that we had stripped her and smeared her all over with muck, neither of us could forget that Jenny was a girl. We had treated her as though she were a boy, but she remained a girl still.

"If we let you up now, will you promise not to yell?" Les asked her.

Jenny nodded her head, and Les dropped his hand from her mouth.

We both expected to hear her say what she was going to do, and what she was going to tell, because of the way we had treated her; but the moment she was freed she sat up

quickly and tried to cover herself with her arms, without once speaking.

As soon as we saw that she was not going to call for Old Howes, Les and I ran to the creek and dived head-on into it. We squatted down until only our heads were showing above the water and began scrubbing the muck off us. Jenny looked at us, covering herself as much as she could.

She still had not said anything to us.

"Let's get dressed and run for home," Les said. "Pa would tear me up if he caught me down here now, with her like that."

Jenny covered her eyes while we dashed out of the water and grabbed our clothes. We ran behind the bushes to dress. While we were standing there, we could hear Jenny splashing in the creek, scrubbing the muck from her.

Les had only his shirt and pants to put on, and he was ready to go before I could even straighten out my union suit. He buckled his pants and started backing off with his shirt tail hanging out while he tried to find the right buttons for the buttonholes. I had been in such a hurry to get into the water when we first came that I had tangled my union suit, and when I would get the arms straight, the legs would be wrong side in. Les kept backing further and further away from me.

"What's the matter?" he said. "Why don't you hurry up?"

"I can't get this union suit untangled."

"That's what you get for wearing underclothes in summer."

"I can't help it," I said, "and you know it."

"Well, it isn't my fault, is it?"

"Aren't you going to wait for me?"

"I can't, Jack," he said, backing away faster. He suddenly turned around and began to run. "I've got to go home."

"I thought you said you weren't scared of Old Howes, or

of anybody else!" I yelled after him, but, if he heard me, he pretended not to understand what I said.

After Les had gone, I took my time. There was no need to hurry, because I was certain that no matter what time I got home, Jenny would tell Old Howes what we had done to her, and he would come and tell my folks. I wanted to have plenty of time to think of what I was going to say when I had to face everybody and tell the truth.

Jenny had left the creek by the time I was ready to button my shirt, and she had only to slip her underclothes over her head and put on her dress to be ready to go home. She came through the bushes while I was still fumbling with my shirt buttons.

"What's the matter, Jack?" she said, smiling just a little. "Why didn't you run off with Les?"

"I couldn't get dressed any quicker," I said.

I was about to tell her how my union suit was so tangled that I had had to spend most of the time struggling with that, but I thought better of saying it.

She came several steps closer, and I started to run from her.

"Where are you going?" she asked. "What are you running for?"

I stopped, turned around, and looked at Jenny. Now that she was dressed, she looked the same as she had always looked. She was the same in appearance, but somehow I knew that she was not the same, after what had happened beside the creek. I could not forget the sensation I had felt when my hands, slick with muck, had touched the softness of her body. As I looked at her, I believed I felt it again, because, I knew that without the dress and the underclothes she would always remain the same as she was when I had touched her.

"Why don't you wait for me, Jack?" she said.

I wanted to run away from her, and I wanted to run to her. I stood still while she came closer.

"But you're going to tell, aren't you? Aren't you going to tell what we did to you?"

She had come to where I stood, and I turned and walked beside her, several feet away. We went through the bushes and out through the woods to the road. There was no one in sight, and we walked together until we had reached her house.

Just before we got to the gate I felt my hand touch hers. I don't know, but somehow, whether it was true or not, I believed she had taken my hand and held it in hers for a moment. When I suddenly looked to see, because I wanted to be certain that she had taken my hand and squeezed it, she turned the other way and went through the gate.

I waited in the middle of the road until she walked up the front steps and crossed the porch. She stopped there a moment and brushed her dress with her hands, as if she wanted to be sure that there was no muck clinging to it. When she opened the door and went inside, I was not certain whether she had glanced at me over her shoulder, or whether I merely imagined she had. Anyway, I believed she had, because I felt her looking at me, just as I was sure that she had held my hand a moment.

"Jenny won't tell," I said, running up the road towards home. "Jenny won't tell," I kept saying over and over again all the way there.

## THE BRIDEGROOM

*by*

Mikäil Zochtchenko

**A** little while ago Igorka Bassoff got married. He took himself for a wife a woman of sound health and a heavy jaw, weighing at least five pood. In a word, the man had luck. Before that Igorka Bassoff was a widower for three years, for no one would have him. He proposed to everybody. Even to the lame soldier's widow from Mestechko. This affair broke down because of a trifle.

Of this proposal Igorka loved to talk. Thereby he lied endlessly, everytime adding some new and remarkable detail. All the village knew the story by heart, but never missed an occasion to ask Igorka to tell them again, shaking with laughter beforehand.

"How was it, then, Igorka, that you proposed?" asked the men, winking at each other.

"I just put my foot into it," said Igorka.

"You probably hurried the affair too much."

"The season, you see, was a hot one. Time for mowing, time for reaping, and just at this time, my brothers, my wife dies. Say today she falls ill. Tomorrow she feels worse, tosses and raves and falls off the stove.

"'Thank you,' I say, 'Katerina Vassilyevna; you are cutting

me without a knife. At a wrong time you choose to die. Wait till the fall,' I tell her, 'and then die,' but she won't listen to me.

"Then, of course, I called in the medical man. For a pood of barley. He pours the barley into his sack and then says, 'Medicine is powerless to undertake anything in this case. Our baba will have to die.'

"From what illness?" I ask him. 'Excuse my indelicate question.'

"'All of this,' he says, 'is unknown to medicine.'

"At any rate he gave me some pills and then left.

"We put the pills behind the Ikons — but it did no good. My baba tosses and raves and falls off the stove. Towards night she died.

"I cried, of course. What a time, I think. Here is the season for mowing and reaping. Unthinkable without a woman. What shall I do? Get married? But who will marry me? Even if someone would take me, it would be uncomfortable to marry so soon. But I must have a woman at once.

"I hitch my horse, put on new trousers, wash my feet and drive away. I arrive in Mestechko and call on friends. 'The season,' I say, 'is a busy one. No time for talking. Don't you know of some woman, even if a little blind? I am interested in matrimony.'

"'There are women, of course,' they say, 'but the season is a busy one. Nobody is interested in matrimony just now. Go to Anissya, the soldier's widow. Maybe you'll persuade her.'

"So I went. I enter. I see a woman sitting on a chest, scratching her leg. 'Good day,' I say. 'Stop scratching your leg. I have business with you.'

"'One thing,' she says, 'doesn't disturb the other.'

"'The season,' I say, 'is a busy one. No time for long

discussions. You and I are two. A third isn't needed. Let's get married and tomorrow go out into the fields to reap.'

"'This is possible,' she says, 'if you are interested in me.'

"I look her over. She's a baba all right. Strong, healthy, can work.

"'Of course I'm interested. But answer me as if you were at an inquest. How old are you?'

"'There aren't as many years as it may seem. My years have not been counted. But the year of my birth, if you want to know, was one thousand eight hundred and eighty-six.'

"'The season,' I say, 'is a busy one. No time for long conferences. If you are not lying, that will do.'

"'I don't lie. God punishes lies. Shall I get ready then?'

"'Yes, get ready. Have you many belongings?'

"'Not so many,' she says. 'A hole in my pocket, a louse in my undershirt, a chest and a feather bed.'

"So we loaded the chest and the feather bed on the cart. I threw in a tea kettle and two logs of wood, and off we drove.

"I drive the horse, and hurry, but my baba on the chest is trembling and making plans. Of how she will live and what she will cook and that it wouldn't hurt to go to a bath. Hadn't been for three years. At last we arrive.

"'Get down,' I say.

"My baba gets down from the cart. Here I see she gets down in a sort of uninteresting way. Sidewise, sidewise, as if she were lame on both feet. Fie, I think, what stupidity!

"'What, baba,' I say, 'you seem to be limping.'

"'No,' she says, 'I'm just flirting a bit.'

"'Excuse me,' I say, 'It's a serious affair if you're limping. In my household no limping is wanted.'

"'No,' she says, 'it's only just a little on my left foot. Half an inch only is missing.'

" 'Half an inch or an inch is no difference. The season is a busy one. No time for measuring. But this is impossible. You can't even carry water without splashing it. Excuse me, I've been mistaken.'

" 'No,' she protests, 'the affair is concluded.'

" 'No, this won't do. Everything else would suit me. The shape of your face and the years one thousand eight hundred and eighty-six, but I cannot. Excuse me, I am in error.'

"Here my baba began yelling and fighting. Couldn't help that, of course. But I, at this time, carried all her belongings back into the courtyard again.

"She hit me once or twice over the ears, and then said, 'Beat your luck that you noticed. Now take me back home.'

"We get into the cart and drive off. We were about seven versts from her home when a terrible anger came over me. The season, I think, is a busy one. No time for talking and here I have the goodness to return brides to their homes!

"I throw off her belongings from the cart and watch to see what she will do. The baba couldn't keep still but jumped off after her things. I turned the mare and drove to the forest. And that was the end of the affair. However she got home with her chest and her feather bed is unknown to me. But she did, and a year later she got married. And now she's on crutches."

— Translated from the Russian  
by Helena Clayton

## THE MAKER OF SIGNS

*by*

Whit Burnett

ONCE, on a day in March when the jonquils in the prim and careful gardens of the town were blooming in the sun, and, over the hills behind the rows of middleclass houses strong, fresh, tugging winds were blowing inland from the sea, a youth, with eyes upon the ground, went out along a winding road that wandered with a naive frankness on and on and nowhere in particular.

It was the kind of road a young man, young enough, would like. Simple. Open. Winding. Straight. Crooked. Unexpected. Purposeless. On such a road, outward bound, are all great philosophies at some time builded, and homeward bound, forgotten in anticipation of more sustaining meat.

There were subtle colors in the lower sky and on the waterbody lying backed against a range of bluish hills afar. Fog mists, quivering tentatively underneath the mid-day sun, freshened the air. The grass blades shone with greenness, young and alive and un-dust-laden.

"It is rather pretty, the whole thing," said the young man to himself, "in its way . . ."

And he stopped for a moment to look around him, while his mind, released from the burden of the world, stood by, ready at a moment, to counsel him into his accustomed despair.

"If I were really a pagan," he said, "I could embrace it. I could lie on the earth here and sniff the delightful smells. But I would just get comfortable, and the president of the Woman's Club would pass and I would be discovered in the attitude of one not consistent with what Santayana would call 'the dignity of mind.'"

He resumed his walk.

"If I were a poet instead of a free-lance fictioner," he soliloquized, "I could use a few lines this sort of thing suggests. But it is to relapse to adolescence — and poetry is one of the major inutilities. A catharsis, as with Aristotle; but no provider of sustenance . . .

"I have no desire in the matter. It is just landscape. Pretty, but it moves me not. I have lost my urge. I exist. I am discouraged. Peace is not within me. All life is slavery when I am slaving, boredom when I am resting.

"I am young, but was born old, with a taste for more aged hills than these, and solitude. Life has moved around me, I have laughed in its face, wishing always nevertheless that I were in it, with it — shunning the prospects of initiation.

"I have comparative freedom, but I want to fly!"

## II

It was with these doleful musings that the youth encountered strangeness, in the form of a person making signs. The road retwisting and retwining through the hilly land that overlooked the lower landscape and the bay of subtle waters shimmering toward the bluish hills, volunteered the sight. A thin, small, finicky-actioned man, clad in denim which once had been a skyish color, stooped over near the road and painted a legend on an eight-inch rail of fence. Large, white, even letters.

And, since he had been battling long with these old thoughts

and would have welcomed any kind of immediate relief, the young man stopped beside the stooping one and passed the time of day.

And so they fell, in course, to talking on their art.

For both, it soon was evident enough, were writers.

"I wrote," the little man said, as he sat down carefully upon the greensward in the warming, noon-day sun, "before I could make signs . . . I used to write pieces for the paper."

"Ah," said the youth, "I have done that, too."

"I was a reporter," the elder man vouchsafed.

"It is a sad story."

He wiped his forehead, which, the younger man noticed, was marked beautifully with clean-cut lines of thought.

He began his tale.

### III

"I began," he said, the whilst with the paintbrush he made idle, geometrical designs on the blue canvas of the sky, "I began with a great deal of ambition. I was young, and felt that if I just worked hard enough I would probably, someday, have the world by the handle. Reporting, first.

"It was a scampering job. I worked so hard and so fast it was five years before I caught up with myself. Then it seemed rather futile effort. Everything I wrote so quickly went into oblivion. All the events seemed suddenly tremendously insignificant.

"I saw at last the futility of such action.

"I decided to make a lot of money. But when I looked around at the people who had money I saw the futility of having money.

"I decided that my calling was to be poetry, for I had long dabbled verse.

"So, after work every night I stayed up until two or three

o'clock, composing excellent works in iambic pentameter. When I had finished these, I sent them out, and they all came back with the comment, implied or expressed, that Homer had done all that, and what Homer and I hadn't done in that form had been done by Shakespeare and Milton.

"This did not discourage me, but it showed me the futility of trying to do what had been done with nature, in general, by such illustrious other men. So I hit upon the idea of taking some significant phase of nature and burrowing down into it until I had uncovered its essence, laid it bare, elevated it, and given it the cosmic significance which would make it durable for eternity.

"Then I saw that this was a one-sided way of looking at life — it was too microscopic, not grand enough. So I abandoned that, because I could see it was not very important. The sex neurosis may be significant, you understand, but not predominant universally; the inferiority complex —.

"Well, I kept on with my work in the newspaper office, because I had to live, and with my reading. And the more I worked the more futile seemed the little events I chronicled.

"So, in despair, I asked to be transferred to the copy desk, where I would not have to dash out and interview traveling salesmen on the prospects of the rice crop in the Philippines.

"This was granted me, and for some weeks I wrote what are called heads over what are called news-stories."

"Yes, I know," said the youth, dry of enthusiasm.

"And for some time I was content. But as soon as I began to feel content I grew restless because I thought I had fallen into a rut. So I labored under this grave worry for many months until one day, I recall, I said, as I slammed my fist on the table and tore up an excellent piece of murder copy two minutes before the dead-line: 'Well, how can the President

be impartial when we all know the Associated Press is incorporated under the Fish and Game Laws!"'

#### IV

"I worked for that organization," the young man said, with recollected suffering. "The remark was true."

"Exactly," said the sign-maker.

"Well, sir," he went on, "I then took up free-lance writing. It was what I had always counted on. It was my life's work.

"Everybody congratulated me, and asked how long I thought I could stick it out. Well, I had a few hundred dollars and one long story I had been working on for many weeks. I worked so hard on finishing this that I had to pay out most of my savings to support the doctors and nurses.

"But finally, with a mind keen and alert to all the responsibilities of the profession and art, I set to work.

"The first story sold. And I was elevated to the highest pitch — or would have been, had I not then have been lying flat on my back with an illness induced by overwork and discouragement.

"So I freshened up and began again. The second story sold, and I told all my friends. Or those of my friends who had not threatened to shoot me at sight for having put them into the first story. And the friends I told of my second success all rallied round and poked me full of javelins and envy. They slapped me on the back, and made nasty remarks. They pointed to my second-hand clothes and my squalid quarters, to which I could not invite women. They showed me their new motor cars; their children. They spoke of golf. And I said to myself, 'All those things are futile.' And went on with my work.

"Well, friend, my next story was a masterpiece. It summed up and clinched all the half-thoughts of the first two. It started me on a line of meditating that looked tremendously important.

I went in debt writing it. I pawned my watch, and told the time by the sun, the moon and stars. And my critical friends loaned me money. Then It came back, after many weeks, rejected because it was 'too much like the others in tone.'

"I wrote an entirely different kind. It was then rejected because the editors thought it not my special line of work."

"I am myself," said the younger man, "in much the same situation."

"Indeed," said the sign-making man, blowing his nose. "We all come to it."

"I write the most intensely serious stuff," the youth explained, "and the publishers say that in the case of an unknown author they cannot stand all the risk of the printing. Will I please come in on the publishing costs? And I am broke."

"Of course! There is the rub. Always the presence of the Mitigating Influence."

"No pleasure," the sign man added, "is ever complete. We want a thing, and by the time we get it, our wants are changed. We repeat the form of a situation in the hope of catching the essence, and the essence is mist."

"And the sublime asininity is hitching wagons to stars."

## V

"I quit writing," he continued, "and took exclusively to thinking. I wanted to be free of the bondage to editors as I had wanted to be free of the newspaper slavery. Freedom. That was it.

"But I found myself in debt. And I was honor bound. These people had been kind to me.

"I took a job again, and it galled me. For I had tasted of the pleasures of leisure, after my period of slavery. But I was wise. I did not take a reporter's job. I avoided newspapers. I

took another job. I said to myself, 'I have been a reporter. I can always be that. It is the oldest job, the most exalted and the most degraded. It is always there. I abominate the work; but I can always do it — better than nine out of ten.'

"But labor became too tiresome. It chilled me, oppressed me.

"Anything, I thought, to be free again.

"And I knew then that if I could only be free I would be a very important person. My mind would amount to something; it would set the world on fire.

"I wanted to be unattached, unbound.

I fell in with a man years my senior who had been a hobo in his youth, and always had been blessed with an inhibition against work. He lived. He thought. He had read everything. He had been everything — bum, dishwasher, farm-hand, writer, poet, jail-bird, anarchist, socialist, nietzschean, kantian, cabellian, and now he sat back in one room in a run-down business block with his books and his thoughts and his pipe. I thought, if I could only have the freedom he has had.

I set out on foot, as he, in his past, had done, to wend my way whichever direction the wind was blowing.

"My feet blistered. I grew wretched. This was not freedom; it was discomfort. I begged at house-doors, although always doing some little thing in return for the food.

"And then, one day, I rebelled against all that, because it appeared beneath my dignity.

"I thought, 'If I have this restlessness in me, I might as well take it out practically. There is,' I said, 'the ancient and honorable profession of peddling!'"

"Peddling?" repeated the youth, rising on one elbow. "With a pack, you mean?"

"Exactly," said the painter.

"I have thought of that," said the youth, "Go on."

## VI

"I scraped up enough to buy me a few notions, and I put them in a bag, and set out along the country roads. I built up enough illusions consciously to buoy me along. I had done that before then, too. You see, when I used to hoe weeds for occasional hand-outs, I used to tell myself, 'I would never do this at all if I hadn't the classical example. What was the advice of Candide? 'Let us cultivate our garden!'"

"My hands won't stand it," observed the youth looking at his thin, white fingers.

"Nor mine," said the painter. "It is beastly advice.

"But, as I was saying," he continued, "I got me some illusions. I would say to myself, 'Now what can be more delightful than the life of a wandering peddling-man?' I tried to think of classical examples, or at least approvals by philosophers, and while I am sure I substantiated my course at the time, the examples have temporarily slipped me — but it is of no particular importance . . . I peddled.

"I peddled, my friend," the elder man said. "But — the automobiles, sir — the damned automobiles!"

The sign man sighed.

"I am with you — and the Hindus," the youth agreed, "they are agents of the devil."

"They are the ruination," the sign man said, "of all us dealers in less consequent notions!"

## VII

"So, while I was free, economically I was still bound. It is hard to compete with farmers who have cars to take them to the city in twenty minutes' drive. Your notions are old fashioned before you have walked from the town to the farm houses. No one would buy my pretty trinkets. I had to wheedle,

hour on hour. I had to learn to truckle, beg and importune, to bow, to scrape, to kiss the ground, to abase myself . . .

"I threw my pack into a kindly ditch.

"I went back to the newspaper office and tried to work as a reporter. But my soul sickened. All the good things I had read in books — damn them, sir, — stood up in rows and mocked my every action. Nothing I could do appeared in any way worth doing. I suffered from a world disdain. I shuddered at the spectacle of motion. Apathy oozed around me like a suffocating dream.

"I was fired. Fired as incompetent as the lowest workman on the earth — unable to be a reporter, even. I sometimes, even now, come close to shame for myself. But, fortunately, I can see the futility of shame."

"Have you never been — in love?"

"Do you think that would stimulate me? Bah! Women are appreciators, in their most engaging role. They have nothing to appreciate in me. And I would confront the woman as she is — nothing. The emblem of the universe.

"Even during my more susceptible days," he added, "I shunned them. I had to have, being an artist pitted against the world, *meaning* in things."

"Well you still have time to write it all down in a beautiful novel," advised the youth, somewhat conscious the other would be able to refute so slim a suggestion.

"I can visualize its appearance, hear the praise in advance, and picture myself past all that."

"But Fame —" the youth began.

"The Judas kiss of the mob! A worm submits, gesturing dramatically to an uncaring hawk . . ."

"Well, your destiny —"

"Can be interfered with at any moment. A motor car can

make my destiny when I cross the street. It requires only that I stand on my dignity and an intersection when the fire-carts pass. *Zut!*"

He gestured, and a drop of white paint fell absurdly on his sunburned nose . . .

"I could remove it," he said, "but I am content. What does it matter?"

### VIII

"I have lived in the nuance. I lived in the shade and gradation of things — books, ideas and acts — until I lost sight of the whole. This is less important than that, the other less important than the least important. I had to have a meaning for everything, because life was so short and through the senses a man in a lifetime can absorb so much but sift so little . . ."

"Renouncing so much, though," mused the younger man, "why not all?"

"Well," the sign maker pondered; and then he switched the subject.

"I have believed in *so many* things, and followed them all — and found them futile," he pointed out, expansively "I have believed in freedom and in discipline; in love, in hate; in poverty, money; knowledge and naivit ; in Rabelaisian paganism and in the strictest of ascetic living; in extremism and in moderation; in no compromise and in compromise."

"You see," he said, finally, "I no longer now believe in belief."

"How do you bring yourself to do anything at all then?" asked the youth, who had on this subject sometime vaguely speculated.

"Oh, one must get one's bread," the freedman said.

## XI

"I had to have a job, because I was hungry. I knew nothing to do but what I had failed at. I got lower and lower. I was once a sandwich-man. But it is hard to walk all day on pavements. I joined in with some singers of Hosannas. I pride myself on my voice. Listen —"

The gentleman struck C. Whether it was high C or low C, however, the youth could not tell; it was an art which had yet exerted no specific appeal.

"Flat," he said, "a little."

"It went well, though, with a flat contralto, and the songs were simple," the sign man continued his tale. "'Onward, Christian Soldiers,' and so forth. We sang in the streets. I rather enjoyed that. I always felt, nonetheless, it was just a trifle beneath me — frankly. But I would rather have sung than beat the base drum. That, you must imagine, is absurd."

"Undoubtedly!"

"But that is not my work, anymore," the gentleman with the brush came back. "I make signs, as you see."

"A sign painter," catalogued the youth. "Well, by George, you know, a man with your knowledge and education and experience —"

"Amply able to make signs," the man went on. "Amply fitted."

"'GET RIGHT'" — he read, turning to the fence . . .

"You see? Now there is an artistry in those two words. They mean something. Of course, the phrase is not complete. But imagine the creative joy I get out of making those signs! The sublime simplicity! The presiding spirit of omniscience directing every stroke of the brush. The worth-whileness! The uplift! The divine — you might say — futility!"

"'GET RIGHT'" — the youth repeated, listlessly.

The elder man arose and returned to his job. He went on silently and easily with his work. Bucket to fence, and bucket to fence, down a stroke, up a stroke, a precise and perfect dot upon an I, a most exquisite G . . . a period.

"I should have thought you were an atheist," said the youth. "You believe in nothing."

"No," the other replied. "I'm not an atheist. I am simply nothing at all. And atheism is something. This earns me four bits a day, paid out of the organization's outdoors advertising fund. Four bits keeps me handsomely. I take a kind of pride in this work, even. Of course, it is not exactly reporting . . . but one can make of it reporting . . . It is a kind of form of self-expression. You see, I'm a writer. One must have a job — you know —"

He dwindled off . . .

"It is something to do."

"And," he began again, as if talking to himself, "everything flattens out to the same level, soon or late. All jobs are jobs. All books are books. All thought is thought. All life is life. What is the essential inner difference? Struggle or accept. Accept or struggle."

"Yes," the younger one was saying to himself, "I have thought out, hitherto, all that you can say. And I agree."

But to this doleful addendum the sign man paid no heed.

One sign was finished and, standing back a moment near the road, he swept his hand magnificently toward the rails.

The sign shone out, clean white streaks against the dust-drap fence. He read:

"'GET RIGHT WITH GOD!'"

"I think," he said, after a moment, irrelevantly, "of good old Ambrose Bierce, 'Nothing Matters.'"

He went muttering about his work. And presently the other legend was complete.

"*Voila!*!" he ejaculated.

"*GOD IS LOVE!*"

The youth looked on.

"Do you believe that?" he asked.

"Well," said the sign-making man, "I am working for the organization."

And while his back was turned he did not notice that the youth, overcome in his sensitiveness by the muddle and chaos of his forming mind, had gone down the road, to where the subtle waters of the bay eddied in, and jumped into a shallow spot, to drown.

## X

He noticed this, however, somewhat later, after he had meticulously made a pencilled annotation in a clean place underneath the legends, and had wiped his brush preparatory to departure.

He heard the sound of cries for help, and by and by, because he was going that direction anyway, he walked along the road to where he could lean over and fish out the youth from his endrapping necklaces of reeking moss and seaweed.

"This," he said, in utmost seriousness, "was extremely futile."

"Yes," the youth agreed, and shivered in his clothes.

"Goodby."

## XI

The sun was dipping to the water's edge when the youth was dry enough to undertake the long walk home and it was colder, with a mist driving high over the hills and sending down occasional searching fingerlets of fog after his chill body. He arose from his thoughtful seat and began to walk, impelled

naturally, a purpose in his mind. There was a novel yet to be written; and it was fast nearing dinner time.

At the fence where the sign man had been, he stopped a moment and looked with reawakened interest at the legends there, wondering at the long gone crazy man who made them and thinking himself, by contrast, tremendously alive, alert and keen in a mental way. Healthy. Normal. Thank God!

GOD IS LOVE, he read.

And, curious, he walked over to the sign to see why a little of the old board had been scraped away, his old-time reporter's instinct alive as ever for the slightest indication of superficial strangeness.

And there, on the smoothed-off board, he read, in neatly pencilled, but fine script:

*"It is alleged.*

J. B. O."

## THE CRICKET

*by*

Elizabeth Brandt

HE lay on the bare couch of teak plaited across with reims because it was cooler without the mattress. Since eleven o'clock he had tried to go to sleep; now it was nearly one and he lay with tired eyes staring at the ceiling and despair creeping over his soul. He had to get up at five and the most he could hope for would be four hours' sleep. It was useless to shut one's eyes and count sheep — whoever was the infernal idiot who invented that remedy? — it was useless to try not to think. Of course one thought. Damned silly to tell a man to make his mind a blank when one was on tenterhooks about the job. The construction work had to be finished in the next three days. The rain might come any time now. To judge by the blackness of the sky they must have had floods yesterday across the mountains in the north and if the foundations of the bridge weren't finished before the river came down the whole thing would be swept away. That would be a fine business. A nice letter to write the firm. Dear Sirs, I regret to inform you that the confounded bridge has been swept away and all our work of the past five months now lies somewhere between here and the ocean. As engineer-in-charge I would suggest you send out search parties to try and locate the débris; more particularly if the river has gone down, to fish out of the mud my

patent pulley arrangement — the darling of my heart! — Sincerely yours, James Goddard... Hell! Yes, a nice letter. Then tell a man to make his mind a blank.

He rose and went to lean on the lower half of the door of the little hut. Pretty good things these stable doors. Kept the insects out — snakes the boys said; he hadn't seen any snakes yet but there were plenty of scorpions. Nice kind of feeling to lean on the door of one's house and regard the world. It was a silent world to contemplate. The only thing that mattered was the moonlight. It was so vivid that it might have been day. He could see the whole landscape in that strange brilliant light. It was like the dawn, eternal, with a sun that would never rise, just below the horizon. No. The dawn had a different colour; it was grey and cheerless. This light was radiant, beautiful in a cold desolate way. Lord, if only the earth was as cool as it looked. Anything hotter could only be found under the blazing sun of the mid-day hours, when it was scarcely any lighter . . . a different kind of light maybe — why, you could even see to read. They could get on with the work just as well as in the daytime, but the niggers had to have sleep and he couldn't get a second gang in this God-forsaken spot miles from any dorp. Well, to get some sleep — in a few hours he would have to get up. They started work at dawn, as soon as it was light. Light — how ridiculous. It was light now.

He turned back into the hut and lay down on the couch. Not a cloud to be seen — that was something. The sun would blaze all day on the cracked, hard earth. This heat — the sun in the day, the moon at night. Never a cloud. Well, there would be clouds soon enough — the heat was the forerunner of the breaking up of the dry season. He'd have chance enough to curse pretty soon if the rains did come and the bridge wasn't strong enough to stand it. God, what a country.

He thumped his pillow and turned it over, but as soon as he laid his head down again it was as hot as ever. A quarter past one. You could even see the clock dial when it was turned away from the light. Not quite four hours now and he was so tired. A great despair entered his soul. Sleep — he must get some sleep. He would be unable to keep his eyes open when the boy came to waken him. His despair turned to rage. He clenched his hands in a fury and screwed his eyes tight, but his mind behind the closed lids was wide awake, aware of every sensation, the consciousness of the silence, the white strange light of the moon. Not a sound... Of course the fact that there were no clouds was no sign that there wouldn't be a storm tomorrow. The clouds would roll up in the afternoon, after a day of blazing sunshine and sultry heat. Great, black masses and the trees by the river banks would seem to pause, their leaves without a rustle, motionless with apprehension — and perhaps it wouldn't rain after all. Day after day it might be like that for weeks. That was Africa. Heat and drought or floods. God knew which to fear the most.

He turned the pillow over again and lay stretched full length on his stomach, his arms hanging over the edge of the bed so that their touch should not burn his sides. Just to lie still and forget — the job, his sleeplessness, the night, the beauty, yes, even the beauty. What had he to do with beauty -- he only needed sleep. Unconsciousness. Even the insects must be asleep to-night; they were so silent. No, they slept in the day, curled up under a stone or a leaf. No nonsense about it. They settled down to sleep and they slept. Like a dog. He came in from a run, would nose around and flop down, blink his eyes at you, close them for a minute or two and open them to see if you were still watching. If you were he would wag his tail and get up and lick your hand and lie down again on your feet and

sleep. A man was a fool. He would go to bed, shut his eyes and start to think, then he would suddenly recollect himself and say, Why I am not yet asleep. How strange. I must go to sleep at once or I shall be tired in the morning, and then he would be properly awake. Fatal once you told yourself you had to go to sleep . . . The fantastic thoughts that evolved in one's brain — swelling and growing larger and larger they rolled out in great waves till they were buzzing in one's ears, a noise like that of a million bees, louder and louder, round and round till one's head was singing and one wasn't thinking at all but sleeping with one's eyes open . . .

He lay on his back and pushed the pillow onto the floor. That was uncomfortable. One had to have a pillow. He retrieved it and lay down again. Good God, why was moonlight so beautiful? Look at that strange mystic light — what was it? You couldn't describe it. It was like a star that had been let down on a rope from space and hung low in the heavens to light the earth for a special celebration — what celebration? — Queen Victoria was the one for jubilees and things and she was dead and there really had been nothing to celebrate since the war — oh God, don't lets talk about the war — what was I thinking about? — Queen Victoria — no, I couldn't have been thinking of her; we wouldn't have had anything in common. Nice, smooth thoughts, one after the other in an orderly row, cool like the moonlight. That was the way to go to sleep. Order. A nice sequence of thought until without knowing it you are asleep. Or perhaps a little of Monsieur Coué. Every day — every minute I am getting more and more sleepy, more and more sleepy — I wonder if I am? — more and more sleepy.

God, what was that? He sat up violently, every nerve of his body tingling with shock. Something had rent the silence; a rasping sound that tore across the tranquil night, ripping

the heavy curtain of secrecy that lay over the land. A single, devastating note and swiftly the night reassembled its dignity and the silence closed down but Goddard sat still, waiting for the repetition of that sound. It came at last, a long shrill rasping whistle — the song of the cricket.

He swore. How close it was! Probably under the floor or beneath the little window. There was no hope of sleep now. Crickets at a distance were all right; a part of this strange land, but out on the veld, not — Lord, it was in the room.

He swore again and lit the candle on the table by his bed. The moon's rays did not light the room sufficiently to enable him to see a small, brown object hidden in some dark corner. He shuffled his feet on the floor in search of his slippers, then thought better of such an action and bending down shook the shoes. In spite of the stable door one never knew what queer insect might have crept into so excellent a refuge. Taking the candle he went down on his hands and knees and commenced to examine the skirting board.

The scanty furniture hindered him. To move anything would only disturb the cricket and the hunt might go on indefinitely. He crawled round the room, shining the light behind and round and under all possible hiding places but could find no trace of his enemy. It was possible that the creature had come up through a crack in the rough floor boards and at the first sign of danger had retreated to a safer distance. Crouching on the floor he considered what to do next. No doubt as soon as the light was extinguished the insect would continue its song of praise to the indifferent moon. Suddenly he saw a glint of movement and he knelt up quickly. The glint jumped. He snatched off a shoe, hit out recklessly and missed. The cricket jumped again wildly, hit the wall and fell back with a soft little plop, for the moment stunned.

He took more careful direction and raised the slipper. Got you now, you little brute. You won't ever start your beastly row in anyone's bedroom in the middle of the night again. Gosh, I believe I can see your eyes. You might turn them away, old chap. It's hard to look a person straight in the face and murder him. Here goes — poor little devil . . .

Well, what about it? He hadn't killed it yet. There they sat looking at each other. Why didn't it move? Was it hurt? Impossible. He hadn't come within a mile of hitting it. Go on, move. If you just sit still I can't possibly kill you. It's like shooting a bird on the ground. I suppose this means I am not going to kill you after all. But out of here you go. I'll take you a long way off — so far that you'll have to make a new home for yourself.

With the aid of a towel he caught the insect and put it in his hat.

On the top of a little kopje a few hundred yards from the hut he laid the hat on its side on the ground and stretched out beside it. Now then, depart. This is just as nice a place for a cricket to live as in my hut. Better, in fact. Look at the view. You'll be able to see all your enemies coming . . . What a night! No wonder you couldn't keep silent. This moonlight would go to anybody's head. It certainly went to mine. To spare the life of a cricket so that tomorrow perhaps it may be eaten by some bird. A sentimental interlude . . .

A little wind was rising with the dawn. He stared above him for a long time at the stars. Have you gone yet, Sir? I can't wait here all night . . . But he did not move to look into the hat; he was asleep.

## JAMBOREE

*by*

Anita Grannis

THE way he had sometimes heard the Hudson River lapping against a pier, when his father now and again of a Sunday would take him fishing; so to Timmy in his strange bed sounded the restless twilight noises of the streets. Like waves they lapped against the little room: voices of women who gabbled on doorsteps, loudly the rumble of a motor truck, faintly the brazen beat of a phonograph, keeping him broad awake so that at last he could see for himself what a jamboree was like.

Before, when there had been one, they used to leave him overnight at his grandmother's. Some things about those weekends he still remembered very clearly: being dressed up early Saturday afternoons in a fresh suit, going off reluctantly with his father for the long subway ride to Brooklyn.

His grandmother was housekeeper for a priest. After supper she used to take Timmy into the church with her while she arranged vases of flowers on the altar. Except at the grandmother's he never went inside a church. Sitting in awed silence in the dim mysterious light, he used to peer curiously at the holy pictures over the chapels. All the holy ones, he noticed, were grown up — all except one quite young boy angel, and for him Timmy conceived a warm affection. He too was

yellow-haired; he stood there in the midst of all the old saints with his hands clasped in front of him in an eager sort of way, and a friendly look on his plaster face. The grandmother was a nice sort of person. Timmy told her about him.

"Now don't you look like the angel itself!" she said adoringly as Timmy knelt before her in his white nightgown for the — to him — quite novel ceremony of saying prayers. And her saying so pleased him.

If the grandmother had not died three months before, he would have been in the old dark church right now looking at his friend the angel. But instead he was home. There was no other place to send him. And — because they would want the parlor, where he usually slept — his mother had fixed him a cot-bed in the little room off the kitchen, where nothing was ever put but old whiskey-bottles for the ragman, and maybe a broken chair.

There he lay wakeful. In the flat below, someone was washing supper dishes. The water-muffled rattle of them in the dishpan was as clear, almost, as the sharp clacks of knife against bread-board outside in the kitchen where his mother was slicing a sandwich loaf. Soon it would get dark and the jamboree would begin. She was in a hurry, slapping brisk dabs of butter on the new-cut bread.

"Ma!" Timmy called, making his voice plaintive. "Can I come out and watch you?"

"You can not!" said his mother sharply.

"Can I have just one samwich, Ma?"

"You can have one good licking if you don't lie still and go to sleep," said his mother, more sharply than before.

"I do' wanna go to sleep," he said. "I'm not going to go to sleep ever, the whole night long."

"Just you try anything —" began his mother.

The hall door closed. Footsteps; his father came into the kitchen.

"Didja get it?" his mother asked.

In answer the sound of a package being put down on the kitchen table, of string being cut with a knife, of rustling paper. Then the sound of bottles being set on the washtubs. One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six.

"Two dollars a quart," his father said. Timmy noted a faint thickness about the words. "Jim's brother's friend took me straight to the guy that makes it. Good strong whiskey, Katie. Give a smell."

"Yeah, that's good and strong all right."

There was a pause. Timmy guessed that his mother might be wiping her hands on her apron and looking up at his father protestingly, in the way she had.

"But gee, twelve dollars, Tim, that's an awful lot of money when you only brought home thirty-five this week. I don't see what we're goin' to do about the rent —."

"Aw, shut up, can't you!" said Big Tim irritably. "You take all the fun out of everything the way you fuss about money. Think I want to look like a cheap skate, not having enough liquor?"

She did not answer and he went on, half apologetically, "You can always use up liquor, you know. And anyway, kid, it'll be a good long time till we have another jamboree, with you that way."

She snorted softly. Another pause. Then she asked, "Wha' time Paddy say him and Mamie'd come?"

"Hap-past eight."

"My Gawd, Tim, you better get washed! Dju have supper?"

"Yeah, inna Coffee Pot. Where's the kid?"

Silence as she pointed to the door of the little room.

"Oh yeah? Guess he's asleep, huh? Aw *right*, keep your shirt on! I'm gonna get dressed right away."

Timmy heard his father's deliberate tread across the kitchen floor into the bathroom. His mother finished the sandwiches, scraped the crumbs off the table with the back of the bread-knife. *Tap-i-tap-i-tap*: her feet going to the sink. A sudden swish of water as she turned on the faucet. His father's voice roaring.

"Where in the hell did you put my silk shirt?"

"F'Cri' sakes, use your eyes, cantsha? It's on the bed. I got to get dressed myself yet. I ain't got time to wait on you."

Noisily she washed some plates, dried them, put the bread-knife into the hanging rack. The clicking of her heels sounded after her down the hall.

Timmy would have been asleep in another moment but the bell rang — loud, terrifying, a boastful ring that brought his mother hurrying into the kitchen to push the button.

She said: "Gawd save us, I wasn't dressed any too soon I bet you that's Paddy. That's the way he rings."

But it was a woman's voice that Timmy heard in the hall.

"Isabel! Hello there, Isabel! Geez, you must have been livin' on meat lately. When you rang the bell, Katie says: 'That's somebody with a muscle on them, awright.'"

They all laughed eagerly, as if, Timmy thought, they were hungry for laughter.

"Oh yeah?" Isabel said archly. "It must be the frankfootas in the Five an' Dime. They're all the meat we got in that joint."

They screamed at her repartee.

"You gotta christen Tim's liquor, Isabel, being you're the first in," said Katie. She had taken Isabel's hat, and now led her into the kitchen.

"Oh yeah?" protested Isabel amiably. "That's right, try it on the dog — *hot dog*! If it kills me, youse can send flowers, huh?"

Again they laughed. Timmy, quivering with excitement, crawled out of bed and cautiously, soundlessly, opened the door a crack. There stood his father with the opened bottle of whiskey in one hand; his mother, in her black and white polka-dot dress; and — gayer than his mother — Isabel, dressed in fire-engine red, a happy Isabel bubbling with laughter, holding out her empty glass. The whiskey he poured she swallowed straight without blinking. She smacked her lips.

*"Whoo-peee! All aboard for the fun!"* she chanted.

Comical Isabel, rolling her big blue eyes!

The bell again. It was the Morans: Mamie, sweet-faced, meek, pale in her neat navy-blue taffeta; ruddy handsome Paddy, who drove a cab for the same corporation as Big Tim.

"Hey, Paddy! Hello, Mamie! Get in on this. We're one ahead of you already. Come on!"

They drank, gulping down the raw stinging liquor, the women coughing a little, giggling with bravado. Paddy set down his glass and moved over beside Isabel.

"Geez, ain't she all dressed up tonight! Some queen, kiddo!"

His stubby forefinger stroked her smooth white throat upward the chin.

"Don't, Paddy!" she said quickly, flinging his hand away with a glance at Mamie.

"You little vamp, you, get away from him!" Big Tim bellowed jovially. To Timmy, who knew the signs of his father's wrath, the joviality was make-believe. "It ain't your turn yet, Isabel, wait till the single fellows get here. Come on now, where you'll be safe"

He pulled her away jokingly and drew her over beside Katie and Mamie who, whiskey-glasses in hand, were looking at her with narrowed eyes grown suddenly suspicious.

Timmy, watching, bit his underlip. If something was wrong so soon, he thought, what would become of the jamboree?

But before anything had time to happen, the bell rang again. Now it was the Dunnes from the ground floor: Pa Dunne in a new green shirt; Ma Dunne, comely, black-haired; young Bill who worked in a garage and would sometimes take Timmy for a ride in some car he was testing.

Their coming bridged the bad moment, and everyone began to talk and laugh. Bill's friend, Tom Macdonough, arrived with ginger ale from the chain grocery store where he was assistant manager, and in honor of him they opened the second bottle of whiskey. Presently Isabel began to sing, in a high shrill voice, "I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles."

They all laughed, she was so funny. But Katie, suddenly mindful, said "Shush!" loudly: — "The kid's asleep in there and we'll wake him up!"

"Yeah, come on, youse! — Into the parlor!" ordered Big Tim masterfully. "Geez, anybody'd think we didn't have no parlor — entertaining youse all in the kitchen. Some style, eh?"

Goodnaturedly they began to crowd in through the narrow hall, Katie leading, then Bill with his mother, Tom and old Dunne and Paddy, and Isabel at the last.

"I wonder did we wake up the kid?" Big Tim called after them. "Guess I'll have a look at him, Katie."

Timmy prepared to leap into bed, but since Big Tim made no move toward the little room, he waited. Then he saw his father had made a sign to Isabel, who crept back softly from the hall.

Under his furious glance she stirred uneasily. "Gee, it wasn't my fault, was it? You know how he gets when he has a drink in him."

Timmy saw his father look at her glumly. "I'll crack him

on the jaw before this night's over if he don't keep his hands offa you," Big Tim said in an undertone. "What's the idea, anyway? You been playing around with him?"

She shook her head. "Coursh not, old jealous!" she denied easily. "I don't play around — except —"

"With somebody you're crazy about like me?" he finished for her.

"Uh-huh! You said it?"

Big Tim smiled then, mollified.

"Listen, cute," he whispered, watching the kitchen door. "I'm gonna hafta work late Monday night, see?" He winked, and Isabel nodded two or three times, laughing noiselessly. "How about us taking a little ride in Central Park in my cab?"

"Great!" said Isabel. "Where'll I meet you?"

"Lissen, we better not stay out here so long, kid," he said. "You try and slip out here later, see, when I'm getting the samwidges or something. Then we'll make the date. Scoot in now before Katie notices anything."

She turned to go, but he called her back silently and pressed something into her hand.

"That's to buy the silk combination you wanted. Ssh! Run along in now. And don't you let Paddy Moran get fresh, see?"

She peeped into her palm.

"Gee, honey, you certainly are a sport!" she said delightedly.

"That's the way I like to be," he said. "Free with my money." And he smiled. She smiled too, and blew him a kiss from her fingertips as she went.

Turning the gas down, Big Tim tiptoed across the floor, and Timmy hopped into bed and lay still. Big Tim listened a moment. He did not go in.

"Sleeping like a top, the kid was," he heard his father say

to them in the parlor. Someone put "Crazy Over Horses" on the phonograph and Isabel began to sing it in that funny shrill voice of hers. Laughter . . . men's voices loud . . . giggles . . . *Tah! de-tah-te, tah-tah . . .* a shiny warm wave of sound that swept over Timmy and receded, this time carrying him with it, sleepy and content, forgetting — as he floated down the dark stream — about his wish to stay awake all night for the jamboree.

Long after, he began to tremble violently and felt his heart thudding against his ribs. Then he was aware of light and voices, and he was glad: it was still going on.

Drowsy and comfortable, he listened: Mrs. Dunne laughing, great purple gusts of laughter . . . thickened voices clamoring . . . his father opening bottles . . . the sound of ginger-ale, *urk-uh, urkuh*, poured into glasses with a little clink as the bottles touched the rim.

Everybody was talking at once, loudly, not caring whether anyone listened: "Geez, I laugh' till I thought I'die!" . . . "*I'm f'reve' blowm bubbuls*" . . . "*Whooopeee!*" . . . "She's my girl, ain't you, Isabel?" . . . "Say, where'd you get that red dress, Isabel?" . . . "That'd be tellin'!" . . . "I bet she stole some stop-lights off Fourteenth Street when the cop wasn't lookin'!" . . . "Think you're smart, don't you, Tommy Macdonough?" . . . "So I says to her, 'Mrs. Donovan,' I says, 'I'll shake all the rugs I like out of the hall window and if yez don't like it, you know what you're welcome to do!'" . . . "Then I drives him all the way up to Dykeman Street, and what do you think the guy has the nerve —" . . . "*Pretty bub-buls in thuh air!*" . . . "Well, I told'm, I says, 'I was here until nine o'clock las' night, and if you think you can lay me out for bein' seven minutes late, y'better take the job and go stick it —" . . . "Ssh, be quiet, will you, Pa!" . . . "Leave me alone, will youse, Rosie! This

ain't home, you know!" — all their voices, hot and thick and loose, like cream-of-wheat spilled over the side of a dish.

His mother's voice, too, had that same spilled-over sound: "Have 'nother samwidge, Tom, have 'nother samwidge, Isabel, come on Paddy, 'at's a boy, step up and don't be bashful now, gee Timmy, pour me'nother drink, willya, fer gossakes look what ya doin' willya, Mamie Moran's glass is empty . . ."

Her voice sounded so very curious that Timmy got up to have a look at her. The door of the little room had swung open a few inches. He did not have to touch it, and nobody noticed him standing there, barelegged, in his short cotton nightshirt, his yellow hair tousled, his sleepy blue eyes wide open.

At first he could hardly see his mother for the glare of gaslight and the haze of cigarette smoke. They were all smoking; she too held a cigarette loosely in one corner of her mouth; her face was flushed, her eyes looked dull and swollen. The faces of Ma Moran and Mamie, though, had grown haggard, tinged with a bluish gray. Isabel pushed her golden hair back off her forehead. It stood up wildly around her face; her eyes shone as if with fever; she waved her glass in the air continually, laughing in her high shrill voice and calling again and again, "How 'bout another drink?"

Beside the washtubs, on which were four of the emptied bottles, stood his father, now in shirtsleeves, with collar and tie unfastened. When he tried to open the fifth bottle, the corkscrew he held in his left hand always slipped, and he swore loudly.

"How 'bout 'nother drink?" shrieked Isabel. She lifted her glass to drain the last drops when Bill caught her wrist. She pushed him away, and he pushed her in return.

"Atta girl, Isabel! Sock it to'm!" Paddy laughed, moving

over behind Isabel's chair to watch. Taking her smooth bare arm, he guided it as she sparred at Bill.

Mamie, a sleepwalker with pallid skin and staring eyes, rose from her chair and shakily made her way to her husband, nudging his free arm, pressing close to him.

"Give me a kiss, Paddy dear," she muttered. "I feel so funny, Paddy."

He grunted, half laughing, half annoyed. "Go on away, can't you see I'm busy?"

Mamie's face began to quiver and a fat glistening tear rolled down her cheek.

"Ah, cut the snivelin', can't ya, Mame? What's the idea?" her husband snapped impatiently. "Goin' on this way at a party!" And he looked with displeasure upon her whimpering there like a cuffed puppy, her pale face distorted and hideous.

Timmy's mother put down her glass, made her way unsteadily to Mamie's side, put an arm around her shoulder.

"C'm on, Mamie!" she cried. "Our husband's don't love us no more. You and me'll go in and talk over our troubles by our lonesomes."

Mamie let herself be let out into the hall, and Ma Dunne stood up abruptly to follow them.

"It's a shame, Paddy Moran — and I don't care who hears it!" she said indignantly. "No, don't try to hold me, Pa, decent married women ain't wanted in some places." She stalked out, leaving a thick cloud of silence behind her.

After a moment: "Better go in, Paddy, and tell Mamie you didn't mean it. That's the best way," Pa Dunne said.

"She makes me sick," Paddy growled to himself. But he went, lurching from side to side like a trolley-car going too fast.

"Whoooo-peee!" cried Isabel, bouncing up and down in her chair. "How 'bout another drink?"

"Surest thing you know, sweetheart!"

Big Tim had finally opened the bottle. Now he poured out four fingers of whiskey in a glass with a little ice and ginger-ale, and took it to her.

"Whoo-peee!" she squealed. "You get a great big kiss for that, being your wife ain't here!"

She fluttered toward him, tipping her glass, spilling some of the pale brown liquid on the floor.

Timmy, in the little room, looked up at his father's face with troubled eyes. But the kiss was not given, for at that moment in the parlor Mamie began to scream so wildly that they all stopped short.

"Gawd in Heaven!" Isabel said dramatically. "Will youse listen to that!"

Pa Dunne was already halfway up the hall.

"You better go too," Bill remarked unpleasantly to Big Tim. "I got something to say to Isabel."

"Oh yeah? Better say it quick then," Big Tim answered glowering. "Because I'm coming right back to get that kiss — do you hear, you little devil?"

He was barely out of the room when Bill seized Isabel by the shoulders and began to shake her.

"Now looka here, Isabel!" he said. Terribly in earnest, he was. Timmy could see his bloodshot eyes, the drops of sweat glistening on his damp white forehead beneath the little curls. "Isabel, you ought not to get as drunk as this. It's awful!"

Isabel gasped impatiently. Her head, as he shook her, wabbled from side to side like an old rag doll's.

"Gee, I wish you'd leave me alone, Bill!"

"Well, I won't. I don't know what's got into you, carrying on this way with a married man. Everybody can see it."

"Since when did you own me, Bill Dunne?"

"Ah, say, Isabel! Honestly, I can't understand you lately. I used to think you kind of cared for me, honest I did, Isabel. Anyway you didn't positively say no when I told you what I'd like — for us to do — when I start my own garage. Haven't I been takin' you out once a week since last June?"

"Yeah, once a week. What do you s'pose I do the other six nights in the week — sit home and pray?"

He looked at her, his lips narrowed to a dagger's edge.

"No, I see dam' well now that you don't. But you better watch yourself, running around with a married man. What'll you do if he gets you in trouble? O God!" he burst out furiously. "I'd like to punch that guy's face in for him."

Isabel sank down on a chair and burst into tears.

"Of all the girls on this block," Bill went on gloomily, "I never would have thought *you'd* turn out to be fly."

She turned on him suddenly, fiercely. "Whaddya mean, fly?" she sobbed. "Don't you s'pose I ever want a little fun? Work, work, work, all the time, that's all I get, morning till night in the Five and Dime, till my feet hurt so I could scream. You think I ought to die with joy because you come and blow me to a quarter movie and an ice-cream soda once a week. Gee, I ain't gonna be young always! I want to have fun! I ain't doing nobody any harm. I never had nothing but trouble, ever since I was born!"

He stood looking at her aghast.

"Go 'way from me!" she wailed. "You're all of you down on me. All I do is try and have a little fun, and everybody turns against me. Gee, I ain't a bad girl, Bill, honest I ain't."

A spasm passed over her face. Her glittering eyes became even more glittering; she caught at her throat and sat rigid for a moment.

"Oh, get out, can't you?" she murmured weakly. "I'm goin'

to be sick." She rose and stumbled into the bathroom, slamming the door behind her. Bill shook himself.

"Aah, you're not worth it!" he said bitterly, and went out.

In the darkness of the little room, Timmy sighed deeply. He was trembling with tiredness, but he could not bring himself to get into bed, for he might go to sleep again and miss something. So he stood there and smothered a yawn, and presently the bathroom door opened and Isabel came out. Wearily she crept over to a chair.

"Oh Gawd, how sick I am," she whispered to herself, and pressed her forehead tightly with one hand.

Paddy came in and touched her on one shoulder.

"What's the matter, kid?"

"Oh, nothing. Run along, can't you?" she said dully, shaking off his hand. He looked surprised.

"Ah, come now, Isabel! Don't you like me any more? You been acting awful funny the last few weeks. What's the matter?"

She turned her head away.

"Oh, so that's it, is it?"

She looked at the floor and did not speak.

"I was gonna say we could sneak down the Island Tuesday night, but if you feel that way about it, it's just the same to me."

She didn't even look at him.

"What's the matter? Can't ya even talk? So you're going for Tim now, is that it? Well, listen: Katie ain't going to take it easy, like Mamie. You'll see. You better look out for yourself."

She pretended he was not even there. Angrily he stared at her, blinking again and again, trying to think of something to say; but before he was ready with words, a hiccup broke from him, and he left disconcerted, muttering, "Ah go to the devil, anyway."

Isabel put her head down on the table and began to sob again.

"I always have so much trouble," she kept saying to herself.

Timmy felt sorry for her; he would have liked to go and put his arms around her. But it was Big Tim who did that.

He came in with both hands full of empty glasses. Seeing her he set them down and went to her.

"You poor little kid you!" he said. His deep voice never sounded so warm and gentle when he spoke to Timmy's mother. And Isabel, responding, turned her tear-furrowed face to him, groping for him with her lovely bare arms, clinging to him as he bent over her.

"There, there, baby, never mind," whispered Big Tim. "What's the matter, hey?"

"I always have so much trouble," she sobbed. "They're all against me and honest, Timmy, I'm not such a bad girl."

"There, kid. Don't you feel bad. You stop crying now and forget your troubles."

"Gee, Tim, you do love me, don't you?" she asked tearfully.

"Surest thing you know."

Raising her head, she wiped her wet cheeks with her fingertips, lifted her mouth to him to be kissed. He bent over her. And it was at this moment that Timmy saw, though they did not, his mother in the doorway looking at them with blazing eyes. He wanted to make sounds, but none came. He could only clasp his small freckled hands anxiously in front of him, and once again, without knowing it, he looked not unlike the young angel by the altar.

"So!" said his mother. "You sneaking little hussy you, I caught you!" Her words were a string of firecrackers exploding one by one.

Big Tim stepped back, and Isabel struggled to her feet. "Under my own roof!" his mother shrieked. "My own roof!"

Timmy, barely breathing, saw in the doorway the startled faces of Ma Dunne, of Mamie, of Paddy and Pa Dunne and Bill. His mother rushed at Isabel, striking with clenched fists. "I've had enough of this business!" she yelled.

Big Tim, thrusting Isabel behind him: "Eh, Katie look out what you're doing!"

From that moment, in the confusion, Timmy hardly knew what happened. He heard the tap-tap-tap of his mother's heels as she ran across to the hanging rack, heard voices calling excitedly. "Take it away from her!" "She's got the bread-knife!" "Look out, Isabel, look out!" and then a long terrible scream from Isabel, a swelling note of terror that paralyzed them, and dwindled to a moan, and became silence.

None of them stirred. They stood frozen, watching, speechless, while Isabel's face grew white under the rouge, while her head sagged forward, until, without a sound, she pitched over on the floor, and Timmy saw a trickle of bright red on the clean-scrubbed boards.

His mother saw it too and dropped the bread-knife clattering.

"Mother of God, I've killed her!" she said in a frightened voice, and was down on her knees, shaking Isabel lightly, touching her chalk-white face. Then she leaped to her feet and ran to the sink for water and a towel.

Her movement broke the daze that enveloped them. They crowded around Isabel, hushed, bewildered.

Pa Dunne was the first to speak.

"Somebody better run for a doctor!" he said. He started for the door in his shirtsleeves, but Bill Dunne snatched up a hat and pushed him aside.

"Hurry, hurry, for God's sake!" shouted Big Tim desperately. He had knelt down by her side. "She's bleedin' to death!"

"I'll get an ambulance!" Bill called back over his shoulder, and hurried out with Tom Macdonough at his heels. Ma Dunne ran after them, screaming, "Run over to St. Vincent's, that's the nearest!"

And all the while Katie, on her knees like Big Tim, kept dabbing tremulously at Isabel's face with the wetted towel, dripping water all over the pretty red dress that was spoiled now anyway, with the great dark stain slowly spreading on it.

"Isabel, Isabel, I didn't mean it!" Katie wailed. "It was the liquor made me take leave of my senses. Isabel, Isabel, forgive me!" But Isabel, her gaiety all gone now, lay unrelenting with her head turned to one side and her lips half open.

In the little room Timmy pressed his folded hands together until his arms ached away up into the shoulder, watching how his father crouched beside Isabel, looking at her dumbly, never stirring at all.

Katie threw the towel aside and began to pace up and down wringing her hands. "Oh Christ, make them hurry with the doctor! Oh, why don't they hurry with the doctor?"

His father looked at her unseeingly and turned away again. He reached for one of Isabel's limp hands and rubbed the wrist. Her eyelids fluttered; she moved her head ever so slightly and looked up at him.

"Geez, Timmy," she said in a small hazy voice. "I only wanted to have a little fun. I always had so much trouble, honest I did . . . ever since I was born . . ."

Her voice failed. She sighed, choked in her throat, tried to cough. Her eyes closed and she shivered.

Then outside, clanging down the silent street, the ambulance. Timmy ran to the window of the little room and looked out.

It halted at the door. Tom Macdonough and Bill leaped down.

"This way, doctor," called Bill breathlessly. A man in white jumped off, lifted out a square leather bag, and hurried after them. Up and down the block lights appeared in windows, heads were thrust out, a faint shudder of excitement ran up and down the dark emptiness of the street.

Men's voices in the hallway.

Timmy ran back to the door to watch. The ambulance doctor came in crisply. Behind him crowded others — Ma Dunne, Bill, Tom, a couple of curious neighbors from downstairs in their nightclothes.

The doctor crouched down beside Isabel. He felt her wrist, listened at her chest, looked at the dark stain on her dress, looked at Big Tim kneeling there, at Katie by the window crying hysterically. Then he shook his head and motioned to the two men in white who had come in carrying a stretcher.

"No hurry now," he said. "You'd better go telephone for the police."

Timmy stared. Police in his own kitchen.

"Get all these people out of here," the ambulance doctor told the men in white. "Don't let any more in from outside. Everybody that's here stays. Take 'em into that other room. No, you'll have to go in with the rest, sister. You can't leave until the police come. No, you can't stay there either," he said, answering Big Tim's blank questioning look.

So the kitchen was empty again except for the young ambulance doctor leaning against the door with a cigarette in his mouth, and Isabel, lying so still in her red dress on the floor.

Timmy took a long breath. All of these things he had himself seen, and yet he had a queer feeling that none of them was real. His brain was numb, his eyes blurred, he stood behind

the door staring straight ahead of him, not sure whether he did or didn't see the kitchen with its bluish mist of cigarette smoke, the piles of dirty plates, the empty bottles, somebody's necktie over a chair, a half-eaten sandwich on the washtubs, and — gleaming brightly in the gaslight — the bread-knife with its reddened edges, still lying where his mother had dropped it.

"The police'll be here in a few minutes," a man's voice said outside, and the young doctor nodded curtly.

Timmy wondered if he could just keep awake long enough to see them come in with their shiny buttons and their nightsticks. He gritted his teeth and tried. But in spite of himself, his eyes began to see nothing but blackness, and his legs felt like water beneath him.

Groping in the dark, he found the bed. But almost before he had thrown himself across the tumbled covers, he was fast asleep; he had not even unclasped his hands; they were still folded before him so that, except for the fact that there was no smile on his face, he still looked not unlike his friend the angel.

And that, when the police came, was the way they found him.

## ON THE EIGHTH DAY

*by*

Thomas Grandin

"**Y**ou feel musical and morning-like," he said. "Now if you will step into this buggy arrangement. . ." We were carried off from the agitation of morose, active, hovering stevedores. "Observe the strange country," he pointed: "here I'm powerfully feudal in peaceful isolation." His dark resonant voice seemed to hang in air as he paused. "I know," he continued, putting his hand on my arm, "that the dust of my land seems incomprehensible heaviness, after your long tangential seafaring, but you're glad to re-appropriate the rhythms of soil — spacially wide, timbre-varied." He turned smilingly to Leora: "As for me, I've made a foolish sculptural experiment in brass."

"What a funny man," Leora remarked afterward, powdering her nose and looking just as Bergster had believed. She pulled up her skirt and adjusted something underneath. "Bergster's round baldness, and his eccentrically angular eyebrows, and a frazzled mustache like thick brushes dipped into gold paint: I like him."

"It seems that I've known him a long time," I said. "Like God, he's half insane, and capable of great artistry. But I have no intention of complicating why his fancifulness is to live off here alone and to invite us to infringe upon his individuality. Look instead at that window with the mountain through it."

"Icy mountains," Leora said singingly: "they're the bright bluish pink of whizzing spearlike procession. Moreover I smell clams for luncheon, smothered clams in breadcrumbs and baked, hot . . . are we ready?"

Leora and I slithered down along the red enameled banisters and walked comfortably into his big studio-room, where we hadn't been on the way to change our clothes: where first I saw Bergster's sculptural experiment. Of course I came to know the thing more completely; but Bergster asked my opinion and Leora came over to look, so I had to say something perceptible: "The brass is too diatonic a medium" — which was untrue. I took Leora's hand to me, her soft pointed hand. "But the swiftness," I continued, "of your design, and that pressure of alive weight."

Bergster dangled his finger across a metallic shadow: "Perhaps I ought not to have recommenced the creation of things; yet because I rested on the seventh day, I was refreshed, and somehow indignant. So on the eighth day . . . I'm beginning to dislike what I made on the eighth day. Yes I dislike her because of the something moist wrong, and this conception of the violence. An experiment, which however has unusual effectiveness, I think." He shrugged his left shoulder, as the formula for luncheon was spoken.

Yet I had to linger. It is true that Bergster put his heavy sleeve on her smooth shoulders of silk, as he and Leora walked across the hushed, long, grey rug. Perhaps I ought as well to have remembered that Leora, like flowers, was perfumed inductively; perhaps Bergster would better have been disgruntled. I kept staring at the statue. I was in the presence of something which came intangibly into being.

But consciously I knew of Simonne the little waitress, especially for Bergster's munificence. Simonne — a sort of

sugary importation, an utility fused into exquisiteness — caressed my wrist now, and whispered against me about luke-warm oysters, until I had my feet in under the waggly purple dining room table.

Bergster twitched his mustache-ends, twirled his finger through the water of a pink and alizarin and sepia-mottled flowerbowl, slushed an oyster lovingly with his tongue. "And in newspapers," he smiled — which made a red straight line across his chin — "what is civilization?" Whence we came back by talking of Bergster's dead son; and returning, got into Bergster's harsh laughter about the disjunctured passions of ultra-nationality, for the whole afternoon until sunset: when we walked on ugly black rocks and swishing sparsities of grass. Coldness began to fly across the distant stretching vermillion.

That night Leora read to us. Under the lamp, her hair was full of flame like the highlights on sculpture in brass. And upstairs she kept reciting certain verses of *Pairsonie*. In spite of myself I had other ideas by which we could dream of lapis lazuli. But in my sleep I saw the statue.

We worked hard in the day at our individual serpentine perspectives. I hardly knew of the something within me — five or six times a spurting discontent. Concentration blinked; I had to bother myself about a flapping curtain. Leora's nose like scaffolding seemed to protrude; and finally one night, after she had fallen asleep, I clattered across the room and down the stairs: in Bergster's studio I turned on electricity, to startle myself — the curious stillness of metal. It stood upright on a blank clean pedestal: a subtle willowness, and like the reasoning of Pascal, or the twinging of hate. She was full, fictile in perfection. "Darling," I seemed to say: to a statue. I went back to bed.

But in the early sunshine I went again to the studio-room,

in order that I might find new darkness. I was calmly in the venetian-red lounge, though impelled to reach out for this thing which so much was to influence my existence. And in brass there was that moistness — a word Bergster had used. I didn't want to believe. And I found within my calves a pounding. Up through my chest, into my arms, many white dots were thrust into clashing, and were coadunate. Leora came with cool lips to touch my forehead, but the sense of things had been altered. Leora was lost to this room of green shadow. Around the statue crystallized light came. And jewels touched their facets to flesh. I knew that I was become another current, of deeper susceptibility. I heard the rustling of intimate lace, moist intimate lace: the statue was moistness. White fumes waved plumelike. Perfume.

Grosser circulations became as dross. In days I acted automatic functions and sat long hours, and stood staring. My eyes could not unfocus. An insulation and joy surrounded me; simultaneously I knew numbness and happygoland awareness, until lines, brilliant shadows, roundness, were perfumed spirit. For a moment stillness came completely within me. I was frightened: no heart . . . this a statue . . . stupid brass: superstition. I laughed. I laughed, laughed, and embraced a newly endogenous excitement.

So somehow in slanting sun-arrows, I was with the little maid of Bergster. She pretended to examine for me a frayed cuff. We stood there together in the upper hallway, just beyond long shadows from a bookcase overflowing with Teutonic philosophy. Her scent had the texture of mauve. Moments were mauve. The statue had become a motionless memory. Moments rose, turned to sweeping and flickering whirling. Simonne stepped backward, her hands under my armpits. "If you will come and let me sew the cuff, sir," she said.

Simonne did do sewing, while she told me unwished-for things about Bergster's privacies; and I listened to long stories about her big brothers in Bretagne. I promised to take her back to France, for she was frowningly mock-serious sometimes, or laughter, and she loved pink ribbons. Her shoulder was like the gilded note of some smooth, soft, circling wind at sunrise: I appreciated our joyfulness, and I could work also: ease was upon me. I hardly made a secret of going half furtively to sleeping Leora's bed. And just so, the late swishing-in of Leora filled me with an internal smile. I pretended unconsciousness, or wished even good luck to them: I gave my unspoken benediction. Bergster and Leora took their long walks to sketch their invisible paintings. Bergster's seeking eyes would shine across the table. And I talked on, pinched Simonne lightly when she served me with apricot tarts: I appreciated our joyfulness.

Simonne seemed to realize that she was my pretense against the stillness. She tried to overlook, and to talk about Paris, and to pretend in her turn that forever could remain unchanged. Simonne's breasts became stupid, her eyes dull. The pretense ended in our jumbled counterpoint. At last and against the dark again, I moved along a wall, found electricity: light dancingly embraced the statue. I stared at thickly caressing fernleaves mingled now into the push within ions indissolubly. Bergster's experiment was intellect; she was the rarified unknown interspacing of tightly assembled world manikins. She was the mutation of man.

Multiplicate heads bounced floatingly in front of the statue, and crisscrossed, into subterranean cavities; multiplicate heads hardly noticed a white, dung-spattered cow, heavily gazing across slime of mud, cow encircled by thickly mazing flies. And from the ooze a dormant snake agitated, ever so faint-heartedly, its

useless boneless legs. Grey-reddish rocks across and around were gleaming sulphureously — then a golden slash through the firmament. All illogical, inviolate to precision and painful perhaps, angular splotches of faces seemed to be crowding each other greily, and then were moving treads of the flapping velour. I recognized my thread. Then all grew small: against roughened plaster the velour was hung — a cloth rich of tone and of texture — and everywhere half-mad Bergster's studio-room was in viridian consciousness. There were tiny, lingering, flashing piano chords; in the click-clack of heels, and near the pointed whirl and reverse of silvered brocade, music became one of those deftly childlike, tinkling gavottes of great Bach. Through fibrous swirling brocade I believed and I saw: an intellectual artistry, a fine and forceful retinue all chosen by genius and marching in unison toward an inevitable, which was burning crystal in kaleidescopic brilliants.

The retinue marched swiftly toward music of a thousand gods, toward cobalt water in the curious marble pool, about which shouldered cypress whispers. Against the shadowed background of this gracious trembling green, on her cool and smooth black pedestal, the statue breathed. And she moved, breathed.

"Kill," she smiled, and then answered to me: "Him of course; kill him: yourself: this is necessary. And in renunciation, if you shall never obliterate exhaustion before the tranquility, you will know knowledge above sufficiency, which is exalted gaiety, and composure: it is tenderness, sapphires, and soft intimacy, and so many things for which no metempirical image has been found: so it is, your love."

But I stood among pulsations of silence. I was enveloped in the blackish indigo veil. A statue became burnished, then tarnished, and I tore her stiffly from the dull pedestal out of which she had risen: I held her at the length of my arm, and

the stairs creaked, and I locked my room, where she lay brilliant, in the middle of the cool floor: lucidity still, caressing fernleaves soft close everywhere. But my heels ached. I smashed her clashingly against wood, and through the shattering of glass she became the heavy silk-white threnody of chrysanthemums, unheard; and below was the darkness of wind.

Bergster has not forgiven me. I left his house, even without apology. I am glad that I destroyed his masterwork, for Bergster is too much capable of artistry, and he is half insane. I am occupied now; profit-and-loss statements are my work. I found new thought.

And I shall nail against an oak which fills this ordinary room with other apparition, some substance or some form which soon could bring me closer to the past: some plaque of bronze perhaps. There I had thought once to engrave a word, Finality; but everywhere about us are many things, and nothing. I will mould a simple, unassuming plaque of bronze, without inscription.

# THE LETTER

*by*

Marius Lyle

Ivy Medlar settled herself at her writing bureau to concoct a letter of condolence. It was a talent in which she excelled, a surprising feat for a woman so essentially frivolous.

When grief was not too overwhelming the recipient wondered at the happy wording of the letter and even smiled at some of the expressions. At the same time nobody could mistake the originator. The charm was all Ivy's.

Usually she found it easy to write these tributes to the dead. She had only to imagine herself as the bereaved one, she with a dash of Amy Grand or Betty Carr or whoever it might be. The pen flew over the paper and she halted because something else had to be done, never because she had nothing more to say. The effect left on the mind of the condoled with was just that — there was heaps more that she might have said.

Mary Gibbon, however, was an exceptional case. She had lost her husband tragically in about the time it would take one to lace a boot. He had shot out of the door of their compartment as they were travelling to Edinburgh, and before the train could be brought to a standstill he was dead.

Ivy had not of course seen her since the affair. Moreover she had heard nothing about her state of mind, neither how she was bearing up nor whether her grief was outrageous. For socially the Gibbons belonged to another sphere. Mary herself had been a postmistress and she had not only married David Shaw the vicar, but had dragged him down to her level. He had been obliged to resign his living, to content himself with locum tenens work and with giving her a helping hand in the Post Office. They had of course moved to a remote district.

Now how was Ivy to get into touch with Mary who might be prostrate: but who might on the other hand be relieved? The papers had spoken of the distracted widow. But after all the papers had to feed the popular appetite. Before the accident there had been rumours of an estrangement. Cynthia, whose father-in-law had a place in that district, had told her that when she was there the other day people were all talking. David looked like a walking corpse.

Still Mary might have gone on worshipping a desperate man. And when he was dead . . . That sort of women would rake up sentiment where it had never existed. And in this case it had existed once. She had seen Mary look at David and get excited when she spied him coming down the lane.

Of course she needn't write the letter at all. It would be better not to write than to do it badly. Or she might keep to him and his qualities. That was exactly what she could not do: to write about *her* David as a rose grower advertises the specialities of a *Lyon* or a *Caroline Testout*.

She had to write for that reason. Yes. It would be better to write the wrong thing than not to write at all. Not to write would mean that she had resented the marriage or that she was glad that David had been snatched away from his wife as Mary had snatched him away from her.

Not that these trifles mattered to Ivy. It wasn't that at all. What mattered was that she should get into touch with Mary who had been in touch with David. He belonged to neither of them now. Besides she might learn by Mary's reply whether the door had shot open by accident or whether he had . . .

The thought made her delirious. If he had . . . Then he belonged to her still . . . had always perhaps. He had done it because life without her was unbearable. The coroner had given the verdict of "death by misadventure." He would have roared

at that had he heard it. "Death by misadventure." Was there ever a more ridiculous phrase? Was death ever anything else?

She must hide her burning desire to know how he had died. She must concentrate on Mary's despair and the hopeless future. As a matter of fact Mary would profit by his money whatever it was. In the eyes of the law she was his . . . relict they called it in some papers.

"She never was his. I'm certain she never was."

For months she had dreaded to hear that a child had been born. None had come, however: a proof of the invalidity of their marriage. A child was a sort of voucher of unity.

What was it he had said? "When you come near me I'm drunk; and when you go away I'm dead." David had said that to her — Ivy — one morning when they were standing in the porch of her aunt's house. She had not been quite sure of him till that moment. Another time he had said: "I should never mind anything if you were there." The words had conveyed nothing but a pleased sense of devotion at the time. Afterwards she had wondered why he had said them. What had he to mind?

But the letter.

Dear Mrs. Shaw. That was rather absurd. She had always called her Mary when she went to buy stamps; and she had known her quite intimately. They had laughed together over the policeman's pompous strut. Besides she rather loathed writing Mrs. Shaw.

Dear Mary,

Forgive me for writing. I couldn't bear not to. I have thought and thought of you ever since I heard the terrible news. I think of your numbness not being able quite to realise what has happened. Of the long dead years stretching in front

of you, of the tired feeling in your brain as you go over and over the one awful moment and see it and live through it agonizingly. Then you feel there is no hope in the world, only a horrible vacancy. And nothing seems worth doing. You wonder why you live on. The sympathy of people, the veiled curiosity, all the questions that are asked and the details that must be gone through are intolerable. You want to hide yourself and think of those first glorious days . . .

And I am only one more troublesome person adding to your burden. It isn't as if we could do anything or help you to bear up. We can do nothing but write our silly letters or say our idiotic words of condolence. Meanwhile you are standing outside all that waiting for a whisper from the other side, some sign to show that you are not forgotten. Oh there must be an after life. A man like that couldn't suddenly go out of life for ever. Where is his vitality? It can't be lost. It must be carrying on somewhere. Mary, you will let me know, won't you? It is selfish of me to ask, but perhaps even the writing of it will be some consolation.

Yours sincerely,

Ivy Medlar.

Her aunt came in while she was addressing the envelope. "Another of your letters, my dear?" On a sudden impulse Ivy pulled it out of its cover and handed it to Miss Medlar. "See what you think." The old Lady read it carefully. She repeated some of the sentences half audibly. On giving it back to Ivy she bent down and kissed her hair. "My dear. I didn't know you cared like that." The girl made a startled gesture as if she would tear the letter across. But on second thoughts she folded it and replaced it in the envelope.

## THE UNRECOGNIZED

*by*

Gil Chard

**S**o little difference in the beginning of this day; many others had begun with the shuffling feet and the smothered coughs and sniffs of Morning Prayers — and had ended, baffled.

Knowledge, collected overnight by the few (of whom she was one), must now be administered to the many, — the pink and white enigmas called “the girls.”

One did not look one’s best at Prayers; — especially in the winter. But nearly always one felt masculine and efficient. But there was that in the evening, after the body and soul mellowing of supper and Late Prayers, that made one relaxed, sensuous, and . . . different. Strangely different.

Every morning Mary Lisle was acutely conscious of the hundred and fifty pairs of eyes which, scanning the cold pinched masks of her colleagues, rested perhaps an instant longer on her own. Four years of mornings such as this had not tired her of this audience: she was pleasantly conscious (for so was she made) that this morning, as every morning, there were vague glances of distrust from her colleagues; — another distinction that never ceased to please her.

Her thoughts were mechanically shepherded now; the hundred and fifty young women fumbled their ways up from petitioning knees and tramped out to their classrooms.

Mary Lisle had no class and no early Lecture; there was, of course, a refuge and a fire in the Senior Common-room. Miss Boucher and Miss Marr were, as usual, sitting on top of the fire. She looked at them; their suddy smiling faces, and hated them so violently that she might have wept. They proclaimed their invaluable normality with every gesture. In a few years, thought Mary Lisle, these intolerably efficient young female animals will be calling some man "hubby." She thought this because she hated them so much. And then she paused, balancing between room and passage, — hating most of all the cold raw morning.

"Hello," said Miss Boucher, trying to be kind.

"Hello; come and get warm." Miss Marr seconded it.

Earlier in the day, she had sensed the raw dawn from behind closed blinds; so now she felt their full-bloodedness.

But she went and sat on the third hearth chair and toasted her toes, wriggling them catlike in their long narrow slippers.

Today had gone as so many todays had gone (and would go) — badly.

Interminable hawkings of one's accumulated knowledge to rows of pink and white girls. Duller still when one has a flair for teaching. There was that that made her a teacher of strange genius; that quality of emotional imagination that drew from the emotions of her hearers.

Four years of teaching had not dulled her awareness to the significance of her own mentality. She had been different, always; but how different and how powerfully different, these four years alone had pictured to her in the lives that she deliberately encountered.

After mid-day she savoured each moment; evening was then shadowing the home, — coming was an escape even were

it only to the peace of a prosaic but entirely solitary cup of cocoa in her own room.

However. It was barely 10:30; aeons of time between then and now; quantities of things to be done . . . Warmed through and perhaps mellowed with the warmth, she gathered her thoughts and her books and wandered off to a special coaching in the Library.

Even her lectures were "direct contact:" through her alone the girls she taught came to their realisation of the things she would teach them. Those who disliked her or were apathetic she rarely troubled about; those who liked her she taught; those who loved her she rated and ranted at . . . and caressed in her mind, till they fled the course ahead — triumphant, borne on the wings of emotion.

And now these eight girls: their French History. Impossible to talk of Le Roi Soleil; Madame de Montespan; and the triumph of Maintenon, in a cold gas-fire-warmed English school library.

A profound disrelish of her task got her, suddenly, by the throat; her prudishly harmless handling of the riotous situation became at once ridiculous. Here was she, set to teach pink and white schoolgirls fluency on this particular era. Poor Roi Soleil! A callow court before which to appear for judgment.

All these things she thought, as mechanically, for her, she handled the great situations, and dwelt lightly on secret communicating passages . . .

But the taste had fled the dish; the eight girls sat sullen or distract: perfunctorily Mary Lisle probed their knowledge.

Noisily one flaxen-haired buxom creature blew her nose, wiped it with care, and then, to the aching perceptions of the elder woman, seemed to take especial care in polishing it . . . The bony protruding wrist of the adolescent, the clumsy

arrangement of leg and foot; all these were evident in the girl who could study high romance and polish her silly pink face simultaneously.

Insensitive hands... Fastidiously she arranged her own silk cuffs...

"Five minutes more, girls." She began a last round of questions.

The nose-polisher swallowed noisily and answered correctly; her neighbour, a snub freckled child of sixteen, woke up to give another correct reply; opposite her a heavy kindly cow-like girl of eighteen or so bungled badly and blushed so that the little light down on her jaw-line showed against the pink; — her sleeves were too short and dragged at the elbows; she wore a cruel variety of garment called a sports shirt, just a shade too small for her growing bulk... Suddenly Miss Lisle swooped on this mass of potential femininity...

"Don't be absurd, Eileen. You know as well as I do who was King of Spain at the time."

The class woke up.

Eileen boggled helplessly. Mary Lisle shrugged, "You want to get some of the adipose tissue from your mind." She passed on to the next, suddenly conscious that the girl's eyes had been on her unwavering since she first swooped on the Zeppelin bulk of Eileen.

Miss Lisle felt silly; caught out in a bad temper; and so, inanely irritable with this neighbour of her victim's.

"If you paid more attention to your own answers and less to your neighbour's, Elise, we might get on..."

Seven other girls were smugly pleased. Mary Lisle felt suddenly middle-aged. The girl called Elise did not blush; instead she looked down at her note-book and smiled. The

class was priggishly expectant, and the deflated bulk of Eileen began to resurrect.

Catching sight of Elise's hands, the woman noticed them long and slender, white with a delicate self-possessedness. She hated the smug seven.

A bell clanged. The girls rose to go. Miss Lisle rose and watched them go: she knew from experience how embarrassing it is to feel yourself watched thus.

The girl called Elise lingered; Mary Lisle watched, — the day, suddenly, became interesting. At last they all were out; she waited, apparently for the last one too to go. Elise stood, watching the door... The last girl hesitated, half shut it, and then left it wide open.

Mary Lisle, aware of her weapon, stood motionless, watching quite quietly.

Elise watched the door and then turned. "I'm sorry, Miss Lisle."

"What for?"

"For being rude."

"Rude?"

"Yes, watching you like that."

Mary Lisle shrugged; — and then, very suddenly, smiled.

"You had better come to me for an Extra Coaching at half past seven tonight, Elise."

"Yes, — thank-you."

Primly, victoriously, Elise gathered her books.

Something must be done; that vague sensation of telephoning with and not talking to, the world... looking from the window, seeing the roofs and spires of the town, she realised the vast gulf fixed between this "preparatory course" of life and that outside.

Futility; hopeless futility.

She was filled with disgust at the sight of the pink and white girls; those calf-eyes of adoration. "Yes, Miss Lisle" . . . "No, Miss Lisle;" — that made her irritated.

Why couldn't they be human and be interested? Interested in the Roi Soleil . . . in her . . .

Sitting by her gas fire Mary Lisle waited the knock on her door. All was so orderly, so excellently safe within. The sound of the gas forbade the indulgence of silence. Miss Lisle toasted her toes, wriggled them a little and stroked her slender shins . . . putt-putt-putt went the gas fire. She might have been desirable just for the turn of her wrist; she might have made one's heart flutter — perhaps — in a shamefaced way for the line of the shoulder beneath the thin crêpe shirt. There was something so entirely personal; a secret smile that made her — her. That whispered things where the frank sturdiness and ability of her colleagues stated them; that made her unrestful, a vague danger; nobody's wife, nobody's love except her own.

There was in the turn of the head more meaning than a thousand novels, and those in French.

Whereas, girl-like, those pink and white young women openly consorted with this or that open-air young mistress: Miss Lisle had no adoring set; she permitted of little straight-ahead adoration — she picked and chose, then puzzled and harried with the secret little smile. She was different; and — forgiving her all — the Powers that be remarked that she had a way with her; she *could* teach; imagination they supposed — probably.

She drew her intimates in the misty wake of her imagination; drew them to her with those half shamefaced, wholly palpitating unexpected tendernesses.

They were different, those who followed her. A little curious, perhaps.

And then, after that afternoon school, — the day half over. How futile suddenly had seemed the efforts of the morning — the slightest whisper becomes portentous in the vacuum of the ordinary.

And now, at the end of the day, the fire. She distinctly remembered last night, reading up her next day's lectures with one half of her mind, and with the other arranging her emotions. La Pompadour . . . what a subject . . . she dwelt, savouring it; then — that Elise child; she also distinctly remembered somebody saying that she was a "queer" child. She had meant to blot out that adoration and nail a look of scared wonder to the child's face. Yesterday she had thought it out; each move in the game; and today — after La Pompadour it was dull, dull, dull.

The gas blared softly; the silence crept in at last. Up the stairs and along the corridor came running steps. The clock on her mantelpiece slipped to 7:30.

She had half wondered, earlier in the day, what it was that events were marshalling to meet.

Now she remembered. "Elise at 7:30" written there in her note book.

She sat with folded hands now, savouring the bouquet of silence . . . waiting.

The school — an excellent one — provided her with a replica of her study at College; that was seven years ago.

She went to her little girlish upright desk and took up some exercise papers.

She was not of the mould that marries; she had too many brains too well displayed for that; and, till lately, had been little troubled with self-analysis or introspection. She might

have been any age except the sere forties' that lose their attraction to youth. Her voice and her hands repulsed men with their cloying sensuousness. Her life was typical of her voice and her hands; for her there was not tomorrow; there was here and now, and mystery. The immediate was the gas fire sizzling, the distant clatter of plates, and the faint and well-bred smell of food that obtains in any first-class public school.

A quarter to eight . . . putt-putt-putt went the gas fire in the silence.

Steps quickly up the passage; a breathless pause, and then a hurried knock at the door.

Deliberately Mary Lisle turned to the fire again, allowing her hesitation to slink through the keyhole.

Then she remarked, "Come in."

An impossible idea flitted into and out of her mind, a mind so acutely tuned now, once so strained in the cold of the daylight! An impossible idea had her by the throat.

To what end this eternal staging of situations? To what sterile end this mopping up of small pink and white girls? How many times had she done this before?

She sighed; aware acutely suddenly of Elise, waiting with the agonised loneliness of sixteen left standing and afraid to move.

Even then Miss Lisle, past-mistress in her strange art, made no sign.

At last; "Oh — Elise —" she said, negligently.

Strangely watching, in a way that somehow made her exasperated, the girl said nothing. It seemed as if she were waiting for some denouement. She would force it, thought the elder woman, before her time.

"Sit down," said Mary Lisle, in a deliberately ordinary voice.

Silently Elise sat down. From where she sat, beside Miss Lisle, but lower, she could see the slender line of the elder woman's shoulder and arm — the firm ringless hands . . . Then Elise stretched her toes out, stroking her slender shins, much indeed as a cat slowly licks itself — purring . . .

Wearily, Mary Lisle stood up.

"I want you to try and enter into the spirit of the story, Elise. Imagine yourself at the Court of the Roi Soleil. Imagine the magnificence . . ."

The child's eyes were on hers; never left hers in their sullen concentration.

Her elbow on the mantelpiece, Mary Lisle looked down. She was conscious of an acute repulsion for the hero-worship of those calf-eyes that sought and kept hers.

The drooping mouth, the heavy lashes, held her gaze.

To keep her sanity, Miss Lisle grasped her subject.

"Imagine the wonderful fêtes; the futile dressing up as shepherdesses almost on the brink of the awful disaster of the Revolution . . . Try and picture it, when you write your next essay, as if you had been there; as if you had been Montespan or Maintenon; as if it were a memory, not a lesson . . ."

Miss Lisle smiled down at Elise — shaken with the experience of her thoughts. Then she took up an essay for detailed criticism; she held the little sheaf of papers in a hand that trembled ever so little to her heart-beats.

In the girls' sitting-room, a piano that presently played something one heard at dances; something that blared a little; that made the air shudder to its insistent thud — thud — thud.

Dances . . . thought Mary Lisle; her voice, independent and

the servant of that highly trained mind, continued to dissect an essay, but — Dances . . . thought Mary Lisle; — Dances — men — palms and iced coffee; — more dances and more men; rough caresses, urgent and clumsy. Undignified reappearing into the glare of the dance room . . . hating oneself — avoiding that man with a bristly moustache — the feeling that caresses bred responsibility and the humiliation of being bound by a caress, clumsy; tousled, secondhand, bandied-about feeling; like cheap grocer's port.

She noticed she had stopped talking; she noticed, also, that she had created a delicious situation. Not cheap port; not vintage port; but a faintest lingering perfume; not urgent or brusque. An anticipation uncloaked by realisation.

She noticed Elise.

The close-cropped waving hair; the bent head below the level of her shoulder; the delicate boyish ankles; the fine fair hairs about the wrist; the swept line of lash and shadow.

She noticed Elise.

Out of one of those rare silences that await fulfilment, the child spoke slowly — as if she thought she would be sent out if she did not make a contribution to the conversation.

"I see now — I think I rather missed the idea . . . about those two . . . I seem to get it better when — when you explain."

Mary Lisle's mind spun; *this* is different, this is different, repeated her heart to her head — *this is different*.

Futility, futility, sang her head, but she turned from the singing.

The dance music had ceased; with its ending came the opening of a door and the flood of chatter up the corridor; — somebody called; out of the chatter came another voice more insistently, "Elise —, Elise." The child shook her head,

animal-like, as if to shake off a something that held, — a creeper, a collar, anything. Again that call, just above the clatter of good-nights, "Elise, where *are* you?"

For that fraction of a second before Elise had stiffened into activity, Miss Lisle laid a hand over hers — that still clasped her knees; with no glance but with a change in voice she held her; "Sh — quiet — keep still."

Silence. Their glances met for the fleetest fraction of a second; the voices were hushed a little; revolting knowingly, as they passed their mistress' door. Miss Lisle felt the unaccustomed wave of color that flushed her, brow to chin. Again for a fraction of a second their glances met . . . they were conspirators . . .

Whispering passed the door; steps faded; doors banged; silence now complete.

They had both been looking at the door; Miss Lisle's hand remained where she had put it. Elise made no movement. Then they looked at each other. But it was Mary Lisle who had flushed; faintly, ever so faintly.

The gas fire sizzed, and the tiny clock on the mantelpiece suddenly leapt into prominence . . .

"Shall I tell you what *I* have written, child?" asked the elder woman; — her firm white ringless hand crept round, fondling the slender breasts.

They were standing together now, close by the door beyond which gaped the dark silent passage-way.

Why was it that the faintest shadow of a memory — that dance music perhaps? — passed white-hot, searing, through Mary Lisle's consciousness? Two hot insistent hands about her shoulders; hers, so cold; lips hot and urgent on hers; — at

some dance; all so — so brusque — humiliating — undignified . . .

“You must go to bed now, Elise.”

“Yes” — the submissive word, hanging ever so faintly on the shadow of a questioning.

In the dark cool passage-way, Mary Lisle shut the pulsating atmosphere of that room and its significant lowered lights behind her . . .

The passage, dark, quiet . . . Gently she pushed Elise away. “Goodnight, child;” — Then “Goodnight, little Elise . . .”